

SURVIVING IN EMMAUS - AN AFRICAN AMERICAN CONGREGATION IN THE
MIDST OF THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY IN THE BRONX, NEW YORK

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ABSTRACT
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Like many mainline churches in America today, the Mott Haven Reformed Church located in the South Bronx, New York, is struggling to survive in the midst of demographic and societal change. This is a small African American congregation with declining revenue and aged membership. The community that surrounds it has become eighty percent Hispanic; yet there isn't a strong relationship between the church and this ethnic group. The project proposed creating shared vision by addressing community needs both physical and spiritual; fostering transformation through the use of hospitality; and enhancing cross cultural communication by using Bible engagement and social media. I explore the use of training, strategic planning, and collaboration; cross cultural experience combined with targeted outreach and proficiency in the digital arena. The project demonstrates how a small and struggling church can survive by effectively using these tools to help sustain itself while planting seeds that will bear fruit in the future. This is the story of one church's journey toward its future, holding on to a proud 162 year history while trying to re-invent itself. It is the journey of a faithful remnant refusing to give up on itself or the community, convinced that it can again be "Emmaus" where they will meet the resurrected Christ.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The borough of the Bronx sits on land that was originally sold to the Dutch West India Company by Native Americans in 1639. In turn the company sold a large tract of land between the Harlem and Bronx rivers to Jonas Bronck, a Danish settler for which the borough is named. Bronck named the place, Emmaus, after the biblical story of where Jesus appeared after his resurrection. In 1670 Bronck sold the land to the Morris brothers, two merchants from Barbados. Jordan L. Mott, a European businessman in turn, purchased a two hundred acre parcel of land from the Morris brothers. Mott founded the J.L. Mott Company and is credited with inventing the claw foot tub, the coal burning stove and the manhole cover. His iron works company operated for at least 100 years on 134th Street. He liked the area so much that he purchased another 200 acres from the Morris brothers and then drew up plans for a village and named its streets. The village would later become the historic Mott Haven section of the South Bronx, inclusive of 139th Street to 149th Street north to south, the Bruckner Expressway to the east and the Harlem River to the west. It officially became part of New York City in 1895.¹

¹ Bronx Historical Society *The Bronx in Brief*, www.broxbhistoricalsociety.org/bxbrief, accessed 5/22/12

The Dutch Reformed Protestant Church which would later become Mott Haven Reformed Church is located on 146th Street off Third Avenue and was established in 1851. Jordan L. Mott donated a 150 square foot plot of land and one thousand dollars to build the church. This historic church was a partner with Charles Van Doren, the attorney for Jordan Mott, as a stop on the Underground Railroad before the civil war. Charles Van Doren was a relative of Mott Haven's first pastor, (the Reverend William T. Van Doren) and his villa was located on Third Avenue at 145th Street. The church has two other historic distinctions of note. In 1954 Mott Haven called the first African American male in the 325 year history of the Reformed Church in America's (RCA) history to be its pastor. In 1992 Mott Haven called the first African American female to be ordained and installed in the RCA as pastor.

The church was originally located on Third Avenue. The structure was damaged when the city built the Third Avenue Elevated (El) train and raised the road in front of the church. Church records suggest that the pastor would have to pause in his sermons every time a train went by. Serious damage was sustained by the rattling and vibrations from the El train. The congregation brought suit against the city and won. They used the proceeds from the lawsuit to move the church around the corner to 146th Street in 1914. Unfortunately the move, on top of the shaking and rattling caused by the train led to even more damage and in 1971 the structure had to be demolished². The new structure was built on the site and according to his report to the Consistory, Elder Gordon Jones, Sr. described Mott Haven Church as a "happy marriage that has coupled worship and spiritual fulfillment with that of community service and outreach." In keeping with that tradition, the neo-modern replacement structure modeled after the Crystal Cathedral, was "designed as an experiment in ecclesiastic design"³; it combined the sanctuary/worship center with a fellowship area and basketball court. It should be noted

² Bill Twomey, "Mott Haven Do You Remember", in *Bronx Times August 2008* www.bronxtimes.com (accessed 5/28/12).

³ Mott Haven Reformed Church "Consistory Report" 1973

however, that the architect's original design called for a much larger facility. The sanctuary would have been separate and located on a second floor. Somewhere along the way, the church did not have enough funds to complete the original design, which forced them to locate the sanctuary in the same space as the fellowship area and basketball court. This would lead to a major split in the congregation as many congregants did not want a multi-purpose building.

Up until the late 1970s, Mott Haven was a thriving, 400 member inter-racial congregation with a traveling choir, strong youth ministry, Spanish Bible studies, and Spanish language worship services, a day care center, Boy Scout troop, music center, library, community center, and drug rehabilitation center.

A Storm Brewing

No history of Mott Haven, the Bronx or New York City for that matter, would be complete without mention of Robert Moses, the powerful Coordinator of the Tri-borough Authority and the effect on Mott Haven of two of his more famous endeavors: slum clearing and the building of the Cross Bronx Expressway and other highways. Capitalizing on the Wagner-Steagall Act of 1937, Robert Moses created for himself a public authority board that he controlled. With access to millions more dollars to finance his dreams, he went from the creation of parks and recreation to public housing and major roads/highways. In defiance of Mayor LaGuardia, he articulated his ambitions in a speech he gave in 1938 at the Museum of Natural History. Moses first cleared Manhattan's slums, sending many to the Bronx. He believed that "only genuine slum clearance on the large scale would make a real dent in the city's housing problem, so LaGuardia's efforts to rehabilitate old tenements should be scrapped; whole blocks of slum tenements should be razed to the ground and replaced with new housing..."⁴ Moses then built the public housing projects in the Bronx. In fact, the Bronx has more public housing facilities than any other borough. The other indelible mark that Moses left on the Bronx was the

⁴ Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1975) 611.

creation of the Cross Bronx Expressway, which cut right across the borough, “through the very heart of a dozen different neighborhoods, each of them solidly middle and working class, and evicted at least sixty thousand mainly Jewish, and Italian Bronxites, along with a significant number of Irish, Blacks and Puerto Ricans.”⁵ The net effect the construction of the Cross Bronx and other highways was that it drove the middle class out and to the suburbs, leaving behind the most impoverished residents which set the stage for Mott Haven to become what is today: the poorest congressional district in the county. Robert Moses’ career spanned 44 years from 1924-1968. It is often said of Moses that more than any other person before or since, he almost single handedly shaped New York City. So influential was Moses that even after he retired, his *influence was still being felt*.

Two other prominent men’s careers would also have a tremendous effect on the future of the Bronx. Mayor John Lindsey, a liberal Republican Mayor and John O’Hagan, Fire Chief. Both were former military men familiar with how the military think tank, the Rand Corporation had helped to win the Second World War. Both Mayor Lindsey and the fire chief were Rand Corporation acolytes and this would have devastating consequences for the Bronx.

By the time Mayor John Lindsey took office in 1966, New York City as a whole was in trouble. The very day he took office there was strike by transit workers followed by the United Federation of Teachers strike and later the Hard Hat Riots. Lindsey had campaigned and won on the idea of bringing solutions and effective management to the economic problems, crime and racial tensions of the city. True to his Republican play book, he promised to be tough on crime; yet his liberalism stood at odds with this position and put him at odds with the police department. Trying to keep a campaign promise, Lindsey tried to establish a civilian review board to look into complaints of police brutality. He failed in his attempt and the relationship with the department only worsened. At the same time, the murder rate rose 18 percent in his first two years in

⁵ Joe Flood, *The Fires, How a Computer Formula, Big Ideas and the Best of Intentions Burned Down New York City – and Determined the Future of Cities* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010) 162.

office⁶. Though he had managed to balance the budget, the contract concessions with the transit workers had cost the city million; yet civil employees did not see him as a friend. Many white citizens criticized him for caring too much about the poor and minorities especially after he had to raise taxes. Never mind that he had saved the city from going bankrupt. The Mayor had his hands full, but Lindsey truly believed that systems management was a rational way to approach the urban crisis; and so he brought in the guys from the Rand Corporation. “The new NYC-Rand Institute would be his secret weapon, an administrative Excalibur for the dragon-slaying mayor.”⁷ He began by consolidating departments.

John O’Hagan also believed in the NYC Rand Initiative. Looking to reduce the workload of the fire department as well as make a name for himself, O’Hagan called on the analysts to come up with an innovative plan to solve the problem. Systems analysis was the brain child of men from the Rand Corporation – a military think tank of mathematicians and scientists who believed the problems of the urban city could be reduced to mathematical equations with predictable outcomes, cancelling out human emotion and experience. They had been brought into New York City and were now the NYC-Rand Initiative. What they came up with was a “do more with less” approach. Fire houses were disproportionately closed in predominantly racial/ethnic neighborhoods; call boxes that didn’t work were left broken while a computer generated statistical plan was used to justify drastic reductions in basic fire services. What happened in the Bronx had a lot more to do with abuse of power and political manipulation by those in city government.

John Lindsey, an ardent supporter of civil rights and a key figure in the passage of the Civil Rights Act, overseeing policies that burned down New York’s Black and Puerto Rican ghettos; John ‘Hagan, the most influential and forward looking fire chief in the country, gutting his own department; and the Rand Corporation, an organization devoted to logic and rationality, recommending the

7 Ibid

most illogical of policies. A city burned by brilliance, idealism and the best of intentions.⁸

Mott Haven is located in what most people remember as the *burnt out Bronx*. “Seven different census tracts in the Bronx lost more than 97% of their buildings to fire and abandonment between 1970 and 1980; 44 tracts (out of 289 in the borough) lost more than 50%.⁹” That business owners deliberately burned down their businesses is a prevalent urban legend in the Bronx. There were many business owners who took that route and provisions were made for “no questions asked” insurance payments to those same business owners. Redlining, (a scheme by the insurance industry to apply a rating to neighborhoods) had a lot to do with the business owners choices. Since they couldn’t get loans to fix up the properties, a fire was the only way to get a return on their investment. Redlining also helped to promote “white flight” and unscrupulous real estate people would scare white residents by reminding them that their property values would tank if Blacks and Puerto Ricans were in the neighborhood. Some would go so far as to hire an African American to go around the neighborhood to inquire about home prices to ensure that whites got the message.

And so the Bronx burned. “In a single decade fires killed thousands, injured tens of thousands and destroyed the homes of hundreds of thousands. It chased white New Yorkers to the suburbs, destroyed neighborhood economies and emptied out the tenements of the South Bronx neighborhood of Mott Haven...¹⁰.” What was left was a wasteland. Mott Haven became as desolate a place as anyone could imagine.

In the midst of this perfect storm of events swirling all around it, the Mott Haven Reformed Church continued to survive and in fact had managed to thrive for a time. That is until 1992 when they installed their first female pastor, the Reverend Bernita Babb. Many of the men

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Joe Flood, “Why the Bronx Burned”, in *New York Post*
www.nypost.com/pprint/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/why_the_bronx_burned (accessed 5/2/12).

¹⁰ Ibid

just did not support her and the things she was trying to do. They fought her at every turn.

Additionally, members report that some unfortunate comments attributed to Rev. Robert Schuller had a devastating effect on the church's main stream of revenue, the daycare center. Schuller allegedly said that the mothers of the children in the daycare were engaged in prostitution while the children were at the daycare. Mothers became enraged and pulled their children out. The daycare then went from a private church run facility to a city sponsored daycare center. But the city began failing to remit payment for the children the daycare was contracted for. Although Reverend Babb was able to fight for the daycare and recover the money from the city, the damage had been done. The church eventually closed the daycare.

Things came to a head in 1999 with Reverend Babb and the Consistory. There was even talk of barring her from the pulpit and so she tendered her resignation. The conflict would result in another split and leave only a small remnant of the original congregation. However, before she left the pastor entered into an agreement with a private school that essentially gave it use of 90 percent of the building. Whether it was out of spite or an attempt to save the church financially, the lease effectively put an end to the church's ability to do outreach programming. The daycare area was leased to the school, the parish house was cut up into classrooms, the kitchen was boarded over, where there were once music lessons and a lounge, were now offices for the tenant's second business and the beloved community center became a basement storage center. The church was left with the sanctuary/basketball court, the pastor's office, a couple spare rooms and an administrative office on the second floor of the parish house.

Still the Mott Haven Church survives. It had survived the civil war, and years of post war climate of Jim Crow and segregation. The church had survived the turbulent sixties and racial unrest, white flight. It had survived the devastating effects of Robert Moses' ambitions, and the burning of the Bronx. Mott Haven had so far survived the societal changes that brought about a decline in church membership around the county, albeit just barely. It had survived the demographic changes and decline of the surrounding community and it had even survived its own

internal conflicts and changes in leadership. For twelve years after Reverend Babb they would be left without an installed pastor and in fact were scheduled for closure. Instead in 2010 Mott Haven installed its sixteenth pastor and second African American female – the Reverend Patricia Ann Sealy to oversee its latest iteration.

CHAPTER 2: MOTT HAVEN UP CLOSE

The Mott Haven community today, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, it is one of the poorest communities in the nation, the median income being \$18,928 with a 57% high school drop-out rate. The cost of living is slightly higher than the rest of the city, and 32.9% higher than the rest of the country. 65% of residents need and receive some type of income support. There are a lot of children in Mott Haven; 60% of households report having children under age 18 as compared to a national average of 48.3%. A large portion of the population identify themselves as religious (52.56%) which is slightly higher than the national average of 48.34%. The largest denomination represented is Roman Catholic at 40.5%, followed by Pentecostal at 1.19% and Baptist at 1.02%. Presbyterian/Reformed represent only .21%. The population stands at 37,008 with the median age at 28.9 years. About half the population is married (54.7%) and a little more than half report being single with children (59.78%). African Americans/Blacks make up 27.94% of the population while 75.91% identify as Hispanic. Unemployment is 8.4% and 42.14% of residents earn less than \$15,000 per year. Most people are employed in low paying service or sales jobs (23.71% and 18.26% respectively). Environmentally the community is not a healthy place. On a scale of 0 to 100 with 100 being the best, air quality is only rated 22; and water quality is only 50. Mott Haven also has two of the lowest rated hospitals in the country, Lincoln and Montefiore. The number of physicians per thousand is 119 compared to the national average of 221. Forty-three percent of residents identify themselves as being in poor health.¹¹

In the South Bronx there has been a long period of devastation and decline. Yet there are signs of renewal in Mott Haven. “Of the scores of lots emptied by fires and neglect back then,

¹¹ United States Government, “2010 U.S. Census.” <http://www.census.gov/2010census>, accessed 5/12/13/).

some have been rebuilt into tidy subsidized town houses by nonprofit developers.¹² Real estate agents tout the “bargain” prices of available real estate, low rents, affordable family homes and an abundance of rental properties. A colony of artists has even taken up residence in Mott Haven. A commercial district along 138th Street has many inexpensive retail shops and restaurants. The manager for Community Board One says the area is ripe for resurgence, the Landmarks Preservation Commission is also providing grants to help restore the community. Mott Haven was once a prosperous and thriving area known as the “hub” because of its shopping district, movie and vaudeville theaters. That prosperity was brought to a halt with the advent of the Great Depression.

Moreover, with the introduction of public housing promoted by Robert Moses, severe poverty became the hallmark of Mott Haven. The housing situation is also exacerbated by an entrenched senior population with many residents unwilling to move from the apartment they have lived in for more than 30 years, (occupying 3 and 4 bedroom apartments whether they need the space or not) because there is no defined senior housing in the community. Alternatively, young families have difficulty finding affordable housing in the borough.

Despite its more recent history, Raymundo Flete, president of the Mott Haven Historic District Association - a coalition of 12 neighbors says, "Our objective is to change the perception that the Bronx, particularly our area, is a burned down, dilapidated, crime-ridden area. Our objective is to have people understand families live there. It's beautiful. It's in transition, but it's nice and it has some wonderful buildings." Fleet has already rehabbed three brownstones.¹³ As a whole, the Bronx also has a lot to offer. The Bronx is home to Yankee Stadium, the Bronx Zoo, the New York Botanical Garden, and the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, 12 colleges and

¹² Jake Mooney, “Potential Awaits Its Moment”, in *New York Times*, www.nytimes.com (accessed 5/2/12).

¹³ Dorian Block, “Landmarks Preservation Commission Helps Mott Haven Restore its History” in *New York Daily News*, <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/bronx/landmarks-preservation-commission-helps-mott-haven-restore-history-article-1.315853#ixzz1tvYCoZ4X>, (accessed 5/12/12).

numerous parks, including Pelham Bay Park¹⁴. In fact, the Bronx was awarded an All American City Award from the National Civic League in 1997 based on its efforts to rebuild its communities.¹⁵

As is typical with most urban communities, Mott Haven has seen a transition in ethnic groups over the years. As industrialization and transportation connected the borough to Manhattan the population greatly increased. At the turn of the century many Italians settled there, next came Jews from central and Eastern Europe, the Germans and then the Irish. After the Second World War, the borough saw a jump in population and many African Americans and Puerto Ricans who had been displaced from the slums of Manhattan, made the move to Mott Haven¹⁶.

The community is now 80% Hispanic; inclusive of Dominicans, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. This corresponds to what is happening in the State of New York, which has seen a 19.2% increase in the Hispanic population since the year 2000 according to the U.S. Census of 2010. For the Mott Haven Reformed Church this is particularly significant since it is an aged African American congregation struggling to survive. There are 11 active members (with an average age of 68), 3 inactive members and at least two non-member adherents), while all around them the neighborhood has changed.

The Mott Haven Reformed Church Today

The 162-year old congregation is stuck according to its new pastor, Reverend Patricia Sealy, “in the tradition of what we have always done.” That tradition did not include outreach to the Hispanic community or evangelism of any kind. Mott Haven had not had an installed pastor since 1999. Reverend Sealy was installed in 2010. “For 12 years Mott Haven struggled through

¹⁴ Bronx Historical Society “*The Bronx in Brief*”, www.broxbroadsociety.org/bxbrief (accessed 5/22/12).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

a series of contract and interim pastors that resulted in a loss of identity, loss of connection with the community and a lack of spiritual direction”, says Pastor Sealy. Under her leadership membership doubled in the first two years and she introduced the use of a screen and projector into the worship. She made an intentional effort to educate herself about the Mott Haven community, including its Hispanic residents, identifying the key players and listening for the needs of the community.

Pastor & Congregational Profiles (see Appendix 2 & 3)

- I. Tasks of the Church: Out of 14 tasks that a church is likely to perform the pastor rates 11 as needing more emphasis. Congregants were given the same tasks to rate and similarly rated 10 out of the 14 as needing more emphasis. Ministry to the sick, pastoral counseling and providing fellowship are the three areas where the pastor feels generally satisfied. 60% of the congregants surveyed are generally satisfied with worship and interestingly, only 50% are satisfied with fellowship. The congregants were divided on encouraging members to take action on social, political or economic justice issues at 50% and 40% respectively. That members get support and encouragement to try new things and anyone who is capable has an equal opportunity to serve gets strong agreement from the pastor. That lay leaders are provided the training they need and that important decisions are rarely made without open discussion get moderate agreement from the pastor. Caring for the sick, the shut-in and the bereaved is the task that the pastor says Mott Haven does best; while the congregants say that evangelism, fellowship and teaching stewardship are what the church does best. With respect to stewardship, a note of interest: although most respondents report they are retired, 55% report

their income is between \$25,000 and \$50,000. Yet 45% contribute less than \$1500 annually to the church in tithes and offerings.

- II. Organizational Characteristics: The pastor has only slight agreement that the congregation and the community are well informed about church activities and programs. Needs assessment is not a regular part of church planning. The pastor strongly agrees that members will help each other in times of trouble. Three areas: joint worship and cooperative projects with other denominations, high congregational morale and excitement about the future get only slight agreement. The pastor does not agree that Mott Haven has an effective stewardship program or new member recruitment program. By comparison, the congregation has a very positive view of itself. Out of 17 characteristics, congregants were in strong agreement that 12 describe Mott Haven. The congregants were evenly split in five areas: joint worship with other denominations; high morale; a sense of excitement about the future; effective stewardship and effective new member recruitment.
- III. Congregational Identity: the pastor sees the characteristics most like Mott Haven as: influenced by history and tradition (50% of congregants agree); and food plays an important part in fellowship (60% of congregants agree). To a lesser extent, the congregation feels like a large family (40% of congregants agree) and gives strong expression to its denominational identity. What is most unlike Mott Haven according to the pastor, is that the church would be considered a “status” church (40% of congregants agree). For the congregants, 50% see the church as being *very* involved in the community.

Pastor Profile

Here is where the profiles diverge. Continuing with the pastor, the survey asked which tasks are high priority and which are low. It should be noted that although the survey suggests that only three or four tasks can realistically be high priority, out of 17 tasks, the pastor rated 9 as high or very high priorities. Highest priority was given to new member recruitment; spiritual development; visiting the sick and shut-in; Christian education for youth and evangelism to targeted ethnic groups. Lowest priority was given to strengthening denominational identity and participation in denominational activities.

Looking at the major challenges that the church is facing, the pastor identified four as major: maintaining a website; maintaining a blog; addressing the use of the Bible in programs and ministries; and improving the congregation's understanding of the Bible. Based on questions asked, Bible studies, conversations and observations, the pastor very clearly is concerned about how well the congregation understands the Bible. In the last six months, the church has given out Bibles and devotional literature and helped congregants develop their own Bible reading plan. Over the past two years, the church has hired a new staff person, used outside consultants and appointed a committee to help enhance the church's programs and ministries. The pastor sees both internal and external sources as valuable in addressing challenges or making improvements and would be open to all but an online training program to improve scripture use within programs and ministries.

Congregational Profile (Appendix 3)

11 active members were surveyed. The average member is an African American, college educated, female widow who has been a member for at least 20 years and who has lived in the

community for approximately the same amount of time. Of those surveyed, respondents were evenly divided across the 45-54, 55-64 and 65-74 age ranges at 27% respectively.

Of those surveyed 90% are satisfied with the sanctuary and 65% are satisfied with the church facilities overall. Satisfaction with worship and the music remain high at 80%. However, 30% would like to see the start of Sunday morning worship return to 11 a.m. and 80% want a shorter worship service (60% want 2 hours and 20% say 2.5 hours should be the maximum length of service). Sunday afternoon was rated the best time for training by 54% of those surveyed. The pastor is the main reason cited by 50% as the reason they stay and 40% cite the worship style.

When it comes to religious beliefs, 50% of congregants surveyed say that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and 30% believe it should be taken literally. Jesus' resurrection was an actual event for 90% of congregants and salvation through Jesus is the only way for 80%. Belief in the Bible as containing the answers to most of life's problems ranks at 70%. Scripture is important in their lives for 60% of the congregation and 50% report engaging in prayer and meditation daily; while 30% say they read the Bible every day and 30% say they read it a few times a week.

When asked about Mott Haven's missional identity, 73% identify Mott Haven's mission as active evangelism and only 18% identify Mott Haven as caring for the community. Of those surveyed, 50% believe in the concept of justice as articulated in the Belhar Confession.

Leadership is clearly vested in the pastor, yet only 20% identify the Consistory or the members of its governing body as leaders. Congregants can readily name the challenges facing the church, with building the membership and getting young people involved being at the top of the list. On a scale of importance from one to ten, visitors are rated at 9 - very important; yet Hispanic visitors in particular are seen as only somewhat important. When asked directly if Mott Haven should be reaching out to specific ethnic groups, congregants rated this as very important. Most congregants can very clearly articulate the changes and challenges facing the community. They

recognize the demographic change but associate the influx of Hispanic neighbors as negative and attribute the increase in crime and drugs to this change.

On the positive side, congregants believe they are open to embracing their Hispanic neighbors. However initial observations reveal they hold many underlying assumptions, stereotypes and biases. Some of their negative comments and beliefs center around the perceived advantage of being Hispanic in this community, especially as it relates to employment and decent housing. Other congregants express wariness and distrust based on shared experiences where they believe their Hispanic neighbors were dishonest. Mott Haven congregants overall feel traumatized by the changes in the surrounding community. They report feeling tension between the police and the people; silent aggression; rude young people; concern for their safety and the need for a heightened sense of alertness; sensory overload; crowding; poverty and blight. Yet they also express feeling a spirit of resurgence and love, friendliness, welcoming and a respect for the church.

Despite its apparent resistance to its Hispanic neighbors, the Mott Haven congregation is a warm and loving group. Life at Mott Haven is punctuated by special events and the ritual of food. Whenever there is an event or celebration of any kind, food is involved. Aside from the usual challenges to a new pastor, food is also involved in most of the conflicts that occur.

As for the use of technology, 50% of congregants surveyed say they use the internet on a daily basis and 30% say they use email daily while 20% use email a few times a week. Most do not use Twitter, Facebook or look at religious websites (70%, 50% and 60% respectively).

CHAPTER 3: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

The greatest challenges that Mott Haven faces turn out to be 1) a lack of money; and 2) dwindling membership. Of course its lack of younger members to supplant its aged congregation, and aged leadership remains a pressing priority. While there remains a hand full of strong and committed members whose dedication to the church spans decades, the truth is that they will not be able to sustain the church in the years to come. There is no contingent of baby boomers or young adults to step in to fill the coming void. Therefore, Mott Haven must “build from the outside in” and must take its ministry beyond the four walls of the physical building to the community.

To be sure, the current situation provides a rich opportunity for relevant social ministry to meet the needs of the community. Taking ministry to the community means understanding clearly what those wants and needs are. There is no better way to do that than to be intentional about how we engage with the Hispanic community, how we see, hear and understand what is critical to this population *from their* perspective. The most effective means of reaching the community will be to involve the community in determining its own destiny. Countless studies have shown that this is the most sustainable method for collaboration and community revitalization. Some of the more famous examples of this are the Mid-Bronx Desperadoes and the New Community Corporation in Newark, New Jersey which will be discussed in greater detail later. Beyond listening, the Mott Haven church will need to be deliberate in its actions, capturing what it is being heard and documenting neighborhood desires. Once the documentary and statistical evidence has been established, the church can move forward in seeking the cooperation of those it

wishes to help while tapping into the network of local movers and shakers and change agents to remediate the challenges.

It will also be necessary for Mott Haven to remind the community that it is the cornerstone of Mott Haven, that it has been here for 162 years and remind people about the kinds of programming the church once had. Often residents will remark that they didn't realize a church was there. It could be that because the current church structure was built as a multi-purpose building, that it is not readily identifiable as Mott Haven Church. Something as simple as well placed signage with appropriate translations can begin to address this.

Critically, the church must reach out to and embrace the Hispanic residents of Mott Haven. As the community has changed around it, so too must the Mott Haven congregation. That means intentional hospitality in terms of how we communicate with and to our Hispanic neighbors. It also means cross cultural communication, understanding how meaning is made and transmitted to another culture different from ourselves. Cross cultural communication requires one to actively look for ways in which cultural differences may be contributing to misunderstandings. The congregation needs to ask itself what the Bible says about embracing the other and how we are to treat our neighbor. Born out of the pain of apartheid, the Belhar Confession is a great tool for helping us examine our perceptions and stereotypes of other cultures while moving us toward justice, unity and reconciliation. Moreover, Reverend Nanette Sawyer contends that true hospitality is the circular love of God – what we offer to others is what we have already received¹⁷. Together these three concepts can be the transformative agent that helps Mott Haven bridge the gap between their deep seated beliefs about the Hispanic community and their actual practices.

Mott Haven has a good track record with Pastor Sealy in creating special programming. The church will need to broaden its programming to increase revenue and create interest that

¹⁷ Nanette Sawyer, *Discovering the Hidden Spiritual Power of Invitation and Welcome – Hospitality the Sacred Art* (Woodstock: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008) 18.

brings people from the outside in. For the Mott Haven Reformed Church, like most churches in America today, it must begin to see itself as more than just a Sunday morning worship experience. It must also recognize that it must be more than just a group of insiders and think of ways in which it might become a community resource that is inclusive. This new paradigm may not directly result in increased membership, but can still impact how the church responds to the needs of the community while renewing its community partnerships. Whatever programs or services it provides, Mott Haven will need to ensure that what it offers is unique in the community and not a duplication of efforts. Further it must be careful in its approach so that its services and outreach are viewed as legitimate and does not have a hidden agenda.

...Christian worship has remained a fairly univalent, text-centered and hence, word-centered experience...It seems likely that the gap between the technologized, media saturated quick-fix world that most worshippers inhabit in their daily lives and structures of traditional Christian worship which demand deeper and more sustained attention and engagement will continue to grow.¹⁸

Old-line churches across the United States are struggling with this issue. Recognizing the trend, one of the ways in which decline can be addressed is by bringing congregations into the twenty-first century through the use of social media. Mott Haven will need to give serious consideration to this area, particularly if it wants to attract young people. It is a fact of our times. Youth are congregating, socializing and even taking on social issues via social media. In today's culture you are not relevant unless you have a web page, a Facebook page, and a Twitter account. Still more and more young people get their information and choose to become involved in civic issues via a blog.

Finally, Mott Haven will need to develop a plan toward solving its space problem. A disastrous lease signed with a private school several years ago by a former pastor essentially gave use of 90 percent of the building to this private entity. This hampers the church's ability to initiate new programming that could be beneficial to church and the community it serves. But

¹⁸ Susan J. White, *Christian Worship and Technological Change*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) 119.

with a five year lease in place, Mott Haven along with the community partner group it creates has the time to develop a plan for replacing the school and reclaiming its space.

CHAPTER 4: CREATING A SHARED VISION

Since this is the place where God has placed our ministry, then it is incumbent upon the church to figure out how to remain relevant while embracing the change in the community and reaching out to its neighbors. With a preliminary assessment in hand, I set out to help them create a shared vision by answering the question: *“How do we minister to and engage with the Hispanic community of Mott Haven in ways that are transformative”?* Matthew 25:35-36 says: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.¹⁹” Ministry must be broadened and become more holistic in its approach. The church has to struggle with how to minister to the community in real ways that make a difference. Its focus and objective cannot be just to increase membership for membership sake alone.

Our ministry to the Hispanic community must be holistic in its approach and application. It must also be genuine. That means showing and expressing the sacrificial love of hospitality; being willing to truly engage with people not like ourselves. It means being willing to be inconvenienced for the sake of that love; it means sharing for the sake of love; it means being fully present in the moment; when we greet people and when we have intentional conversation with people. Hospitality allows us to truly “see” them. Paraphrasing the meaning of the Zulu greeting, “Ubuntu” which means, “I am what I am because of who we are collectively” and “Sawu bona” means, “I see you, I am a person and I exist because you see me and you acknowledge me.” Transformation will take place when we see them and they can see us.

¹⁹ Matt. 25:35-36 (New International Version)

Brueggemann notes that, “Jesus in his solidarity with the marginal ones is moved to compassion.”²⁰ Mercy is compassion that is moved to action. Christ expects no less of us; to have mercy on our brothers and sisters. This is the lesson of Matthew 25:35-36; and it is a lesson Jesus taught again and again. He understood the human need to be nourished temporally as well as spiritually. Compassion that is moved to action is what it means to truly love our neighbor as ourselves. In order for our encounters to be transformative, we must appreciate the practical aspects of ministry. A common colloquialism is that “I must know how much you care before I can care about how much you know.” In other words, I can’t hear you if you don’t recognize my stomach is growling, I don’t have proper clothing, I am homeless or you dismiss my pain or my struggles. Sometimes we can get so caught up in action, though, that we really don’t show compassion. Case in point, once a man came to the church where I was serving and said he was hungry and had nothing to eat. I was so busy trying to respond to his hunger that I failed to see anything else. Finally our receptionist had to stop me and ask, “Don’t you see that he is dirty and needs clothes?” Shamefully I had to admit that I didn’t fully *see* him. He needed me to see him as a whole person and he needed to be ministered to practically and holistically. Compassion that is moved to action cannot be accomplished if there is only action. Compassion is at the root of the love of Christ.

But before we can get to the practical we must first recognize our interconnectedness. Mott Haven will need to explore what the Bible says about how we treat our neighbors, how we love them as ourselves. Christ calls us into community. The church is the community and the community is the church. It is where we come to find support for ourselves while giving support to others and it is from this vantage point that we perform acts of service. The church is called to extend the love of Christ, grace and mercy to all. Church as it should be is as a community of

²⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 88.

believers who love and support each other as well as the stranger. Christians as a group, have the obligation to be as forgiving as Christ, as loving as Christ and as concerned as Christ. As a church we are called to model Christ's love and concern for our fellow man. Recovering the lost art of Christian hospitality, as well as studying the Belhar Confessional mandate for unity, reconciliation, and justice will help us to engage the other. It will also ensure a foundation for a building shared vision.

According to the Confession,

Our understanding of God's Word and God's will for our lives and for our world comes not individually, but through our shared discernment in the life of the church. Therefore, we must think, study and search together, testing our own individual assumptions with each other and against Scripture, being open to the Spirit, risking disagreement and treating each other with the mutual affirmation and admonition that the gospel of Christ demands.²¹

This is not a journey for Mott Haven Reformed Church alone. The times demand that we, together with our Hispanics neighbors walk together, pray together and work together to see what God has in store for us and this community in the future.

Moreover, creating a community partner group to work on joint issues brings the Mott Haven congregation into compliance with its mission statement's call to be "advocates for those with no voice." Demonstrating care for our neighbor means speaking up and speaking out for those who cannot speak for themselves – the poor and vulnerable. The residents of Mott Haven are indeed the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized. We cannot escape our obligation to use the "bully" pulpit and engage those same neighbors in direct action to address systems of oppression and injustice and issues of mutual concern.

²¹ Reformed Church in America, *Unity, Reconciliation and Justice: A Study Guide for the Belhar Confession* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Church Press, 2006) 1.

The first goal of this project then, was to build a foundation by creating a shared vision for transformation of Mott Haven: the congregation and the Hispanic community through mutuality of purpose. With that in mind I began a nine-week study of the Belhar Confession as adopted by the Reformed Church in America, and its practical implementation as it relates to “embracing the other.” Participants included church leaders and congregants. Although other churches from the New York Classis were invited, flyers and postcards sent out, none chose to participate. About eight members and the pastor met once per week for two hours and at the conclusion of each session they were assigned short homework assignments and given inspirational quotes to reflect upon. The study guide, Unity, Reconciliation and Justice,²² published by the Reformed Church in America was used as the main teaching tool along with the Bible and use of small group discussion, surveys, role play and reflection exercises.

We started with a perception and attitude survey from the Belhar Study Guide on Welcoming Diversity²³. Then we engaged in self-examination, looking at the African American experience in America, specifically from the post slavery period of Jim Crow through the present day. Participants were asked to describe their feelings and reactions to an instance when they had themselves been discriminated against. The pain of segregation became tangible in the room as one of our elders who is ninety years old, recounted stories of growing up in the South. One by one they each shared their experiences; and we were all transported back in time to those incidents that been seared into our memories. We were immediately unified by a painful past common to all of us. Having gotten in touch with those feelings, we could move on to the Belhar Confession and discuss how it came into being.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid

Born out of the state of apartheid in South Africa, the Confession was created in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in response to the churches who were practicing segregation. In 1986 it was adopted by The Reformed Church in America and became one of its Standards of Unity. New York is fortunate to have Elders in the RCA such as Dr. Oliver Patterson, who were a part of the team that went to South Africa to learn about the Confession and who brought it back to America and were instrumental in getting it accepted as one of the RCA's Confessions.

Belhar is both an indictment and a call to action for all Christians. "What is it that we believe God is calling us to be and to do in this day and time? How might we as Christian people understand the will of God and live this out as those called to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world?"²⁴ In reality, the Belhar Confession calls on everyone who would dare call themselves a Christian, to do and to be the very thing that Jesus asked us to be. Not only must we love our neighbor as ourselves, we must recognize that we are all a part of the human race, a part of the universal communion and all are heirs of the same salvation, children of the one God. Moreover it challenges us to recognize when there are people, systems, policies and powers that treat our brothers and sisters unjustly and demands that we stand with and for them. Belhar requires that we embrace "the other" fully and completely. In so doing, we live out the true meaning of our calling to be disciples of Jesus Christ, "treating the people's needs as holy" as Obery Hendricks would say, while seeking justice, reconciliation and unity.

Having established this as our baseline, we could then move further into our examination of the Belhar Confession by looking at forms of exclusion, and identifying excluded groups. Participants were able to make the connection that not only are African Americans an excluded group but so are Hispanics, gays, lesbians, etc. They were then asked to explore the reasons why certain groups are excluded connecting that behavior to the specific ways we practice exclusion.

²⁴ Reformed Church in America "Statement of Mission and Vision" 2010

Everyone was challenged to look for evidence of bias and exclusion in the media or in a situation in the community, at home as well as in the church. During group discussion participants were asked to share a true situation or story about injustice.

One of the foundational principles of the Belhar Confession is that we are called to understand that “the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions as well as the various languages and cultures that are, by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God.”²⁵ With this understanding the group discussed the blessing of unity found in the gifts we receive from others not like us. Everyone was asked to share what gifts they might have received. Asked to consider what things most threaten the unity of our congregation whether they be spoken or unspoken, written or unwritten, by tradition and habit or by denominational practice, participants identified things like: disharmony, jealousy, lies and deceit, cliques, selfishness, false teaching and having differing mind sets as factors. Taking them back to the principles of unity as outlined in the Confession, participants were challenged to complete the following statements, “It is hardest for me to love Christians who...” and “It is hardest for me to love people who...”

Afterward the group took an in-depth look at the 4th chapter of John, and the story of the woman at the well. Being a Samaritan, a divorcee and living with a man she was not married to, were all grounds for excluding her from the rest of society. It was a condition she was used to, that is until Jesus comes along. What does Jesus offer people like her? Most importantly he offers non-judgmental acceptance which can restore a person’s self-esteem. Jesus first gave her an opportunity to practice hospitality as he himself was practicing intentional hospitality in that he purposely went to where she lived, he met her where she was and he went out of his way to do it. He put value on worship not the location where they worshipped or their cultural differences. Jesus also offers his own vulnerability as he shares who he is. What was the excluded woman’s

²⁵ Ibid.

response to Jesus? She responded to the way he accepted her and she accepted him. She questioned him to see if his acceptance was genuine, if he was for real. The woman also went back to the Word. Apparently she knew the Word and she wanted to evaluate whether what he was telling her lined up with the Word. Because of Jesus's sacrificial love and hospitality, transformation takes place. The excluded woman's life is changed and she sets out to change the life of others. This biblical story is a road map for own interactions with others and how we *love* our neighbor as ourselves.

Afterward the group was given an exercise called, "Where I Belong" which takes learners from an "I" perspective to a "we" perspective. The idea is to help learners locate themselves within the human family and to understand that every person is a person on many levels and has many layers. For instance, a woman can be a daughter, a sister, a niece, an aunt, a God-mother, wife and friend concurrently. In addition she has membership in a number of groups, the church she belongs to, the school she went to, the place where she works, the clubs and organizations she is a part of, the political party she might be affiliated with, etc. At the same time, she lives in a particular economic strata, and is a member of a particular ethnic culture, tied to a particular land. If she is African American she is part of the diaspora, a disenfranchised, oppressed and excluded people. If she is a Christian then she has a social location that colors the way that she engages Scripture. All of this has important implications for our work around the Belhar Confession. Steven Covey says, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." When you help a person locate themselves in their own context as well as within humanity, you can lead them to a better understanding of "the other" i.e. Hispanics, by connecting them to someone who may look different and perhaps speak differently but who has the same location and the same issues, and has experienced the same oppression and exclusion. Helping them find their location opens the door for them to embrace the Confession's ideal of one humanity, serving one God.

We next turned to 2 Corinthians 5:16-20. Using the Message Bible translation for added clarity, the lesson focuses on not judging people by how they look or what they have. Learners

are reminded how the people looked at Jesus and got it wrong. As Christians, as representatives of Christ, our job is to break down barriers, to be the peace makers and bring people together. This particular translation is particularly useful when dealing with touchy situations. It breaks down the lesson of the Scripture in everyday language that the average person can understand and seems to take the sting out of what might be interpreted as judgment on the part of the instructor.

Finally the group was asked to read Luke 4:14-30. Their assignment was to act out the Scripture. Here it seems the class got a breakthrough. They took to this assignment with lots of energy and excitement. They especially liked getting into character and being someone other than themselves. It was a short but powerful production. The group was so proud of what they had done, that the very next Sunday before I had a chance to tell the pastor, they had gone to her themselves and asked if they could repeat their performance for the whole congregation. They wanted to show the rest of the members what they had learned. Asked to write down what they had learned, this is what they had to say:

"[Belhar] teaches you who you are. Makes you question how you look at life..."

"Unity is what you can do as a group. It teaches you justice; that God accepts you as you – race or color don't matter. When you are different or speak a different language it doesn't matter..."

"God don't discriminate, he's for everybody. He wants you to go out to everyone and let them come. He wants us to tell them that he understands. He wants all people to come together and get involved with each other..."

"To be honest..."

"No matter who we are, we are supposed to love, pray together and not be selfish..."

"We talk more than we take action..."

"I have to ask God about that - why we still sit in separate churches..."

"We call ourselves by different names, German, Italians, etc. But it's not about color. Perhaps we need to be multi-racial instead..."

"Belhar is written in a way that people can understand if they choose to..."

"Haven't learned anything different. It reinforced what apartheid was about. Made me look at the Dutch Church and its role in apartheid. Reinforced for me when the church has been supportive of racism and has not followed what Christ called us to do. And the intensive and difficult work it has to do. It has given me some hope that maybe if we really are sincere about being people of God – we can get there.

"How to work together and not be divided..."

“More about people getting involved and what the Bible says about it – there’s more to it...”

“This teaching was put into place because of division in the church to expose divisions and help us be more appreciative of those not like you. We should be loving to each other...”

Participants also had to develop personal statements as to what they would do with the gift of the Belhar Confession. Each one rededicated themselves to serving the community. One person committed to donating her used clothing to the Dress for Success program that helps underprivileged women obtain the necessary clothing and skills to interview for a job. Another committed to working on justice issues and to helping a group of her neighbors resolve some housing issues. The oldest member of the group who is 90 committed to being intentional about speaking to her Hispanic neighbors.

Turning to Mott Haven’s Vision and Mission Statements, the group was asked to identify the ways in which the statements did or did not line up with the Belhar Confession. Mott Haven’s Vision is to be a multi-cultural, intergenerational and transformative church. Its values are: Service, Diversity, Unity and Empowered and Nurtured Leaders. All concluded that indeed Mott Haven’s Vision and Mission Statements are representative of the Confession. Key words such as diversity, unity, intergenerational and multi-cultural are foundational to and representative of the Confession. Mott Haven’s Mission is to: feed the poor with both spiritual and natural food; provide a safe haven for youth; advocate for the voiceless, be a healing community; establish a center of learning; bring the peace of God to the community and be the living presence of Christ. Here we have the praxis of Mott Haven, acting out what it means to be the living presence of Christ. By linking these statements to the Belhar Confession we were able to 1) raise the awareness of the congregation – since many of them did not know what the Vision and Mission were; and 2) give them some concrete examples of how the Confession might be applied to their daily lives. “The pastoral imagination works in tandem with something else – the

congregational imagination, the imagination of God's people in community. The pastoral imagination and the congregational imagination are two different angles of vocational calling and vision, one from the pulpit and the other from the pew, of a common spiritual gift of seeing God at work and embodying faith, hope and love in the world.²⁶

As a final assignment the group went out into the community in teams of two and distributed bi-lingual invitations to people inviting them to service. Surprisingly they really enjoyed it. We had with us one of the guest Hispanic ministers who was going to preach the next day. He is a young man and he seemed to fall right in. He was so comfortable out talking to the people that he got lost for a while. The group really did embrace him and tried to look out for him while we were canvassing the neighborhood. When they thought he was lost they immediately set out to find him. What a contrast compared with their almost violent reaction to Hispanic visitors a few months earlier, when a Hispanic minister and members of her congregation came to conduct the Sunday morning worship service. The first thing I noticed was how the Mott Haven members seemed to segregate themselves on one side of the sanctuary so they could stare at and literally look down on this group of visitors. This congregation, although it is an RCA church is decidedly more Pentecostal in its approach to worship. The praise and worship went on for about 45 minutes which seemed to enrage Mott Haven congregants. They were not shy about voicing their displeasure, loudly. When our visitors began to vigorously engage in the worship and testimony service, speaking in tongues and praising God, members of Mott Haven nearly rioted. Some even walked out. By the time we got to prayer time, Mott Haven was on one side and our guests on the other. In fact, there is a photograph that captures the moment. (See Appendix 6)

²⁶ Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation Imagining a New Old Church*, (Herndon: The Alban Institute) 5.

One other outcome of the Bible study was that in support of the Confession, the pastor incorporated the Belhar Confession into the regular worship service. Now the Confession is recited on Sunday mornings at least three times a month.

Building upon the work done with the Belhar Confession, we next sought to raise the level of awareness of Christian hospitality as a lost art and the need for demonstrating intentional hospitality through another specialized Bible study. This workshop draws heavily on the work of Rev. Nanette Sawyer in Discovering the Hidden Spiritual Power of Invitation and Welcome – Hospitality the Sacred Art²⁷ and Alexander Strauch – The Hospitality Commands²⁸ and Christine D. Pohl in Making Room Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition²⁹. However, it was delayed by a number of months due to what seemed a lack of interest. The pre-survey about attitudes toward diversity (see Appendix 4) revealed that participants did not think they were necessarily equipped or trained in how to reach out to others. This was an important finding that would be used during the hospitality workshop to help define the scope of the workshop. Similar to the Belhar class, participants met once per week for an hour and a half while having a meal together. Ten participants showed up for the first session. Part two of the parish profile survey was distributed. After an overview of hospitality, participants were asked to share a memory over dinner of when unexpected hospitality was shown to them. Next the group explored the scriptural commands to engage in hospitality. We also looked at comments made by historians regarding the early church, of which hospitality was a marker. Some survey results were shared with the group which suggest that the majority of members believe that Mott Haven has an active evangelism focus but only a small percentage (73 and 18% respectively) saw Mott Haven's focus

²⁷ Rev. Nanette Sawyer, *Discovering the Hidden Spiritual Power of Invitation and Welcome*, (Woodstock: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008)

²⁸ Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands Building Loving Christian Community Building Bridges to Friends and Neighbors*, (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1993)

²⁹ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999)

as caring for the community (see Appendix 4). Another survey result says that while most members believe that visitors are very important to Mott Haven, Hispanic visitors in particular were seen as only somewhat important. The goal here is to drive home the point that you must first have hospitality before you can do evangelism. Secondly, given the change in demographics in the community, an emphasis on Hispanic visitors is definitely needed. The group was given a reflective assignment to search the Scriptures and understand at least two reasons why hospitality is a New Testament command and to come up with ways in which they could promote hospitality at Mott Haven.

At our next session we began with the concept of Ubuntu. As we stood in a circle, each person went around the circle and greeted each of the other members of the group, looking them directly in the eye and saying “Namaste – the God in me salutes the God in you.” As they did this, the group was taught the principles of Ubuntu and Sawu Bona – “I am what I am because of who we all are” and “I see you”. Not only was it a great ice breaker, but it set the tone for the rest of our learning that day. We next explored the concept of having a meal together and why that is important. Food plays a very big part at Mott Haven, but congregants needed to see it in the context of a sacred duty – the duty of hospitality. “Churches, like families, need to eat together to sustain their identity as a community. The table is central to the practice of hospitality in homes and church – the nourishment we gain there is physical, spiritual and social. Whether we gather around the table for the Lord’s Supper or for a church potluck dinner, we are strengthened as a community.³⁰” Of course everyone agreed with this statement. Having gotten their agreement, we turned our attention to a demonstration of fervent love as described by the Apostle Paul. The story of “the long handled spoons” which essentially says if you have a long handled spoon and are trying to feed yourself, you are less likely to be nourished as opposed to using the spoons to feed each other and be well fed, was used to underscore the day’s teachings.

³⁰ Ibid

Participants were asked to act out this story. As with the Belhar workshop, the group especially enjoyed acting out the lesson. Then they were given a reflective assignment. They were each asked to think of three benefits they would receive by actively engaging in hospitality and three benefits that the recipients of our hospitality would receive. They were also challenged to invite one person the Christmas concert that featured a Korean Missionary Choir and to serve as greeters at the door.

The next session focused more on showing hospitality to each other as the pastor was concerned that while they were beginning to understand why they should show hospitality to guests and to others not like ourselves, the congregants didn't always show hospitality to one another. We began with the question, "Why do we worship God?" We worship God because we are grateful. We are grateful to God for his salvation; we are grateful to God for his love for us and for the gift of his son Jesus Christ. We are grateful because we know that we don't deserve it and as an expression of our gratitude, we embrace our brother and our sister. We follow Christ's command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Our neighbor is also our brother and our sister. Then we showed a 12 minute video clip by Brother David Stienl-Rast on being grateful³¹. The premise being that if you are truly grateful, then it ought to be reflected in how you live your life and how you behave, how you treat others. If you are grateful, you value and appreciate the diversity that God has created. The next question for discussion then was what happens when we don't treat our brother and sister the way we should? What happens to the church? Participants were asked to engage in a small group discussion around the questions: "How can hospitality improve interpersonal relationships and lessen church conflict? What do the "one another commands" (1Peter 4:9) teach you about the Christian life and the nature of the local church?³²"

³¹ David Stienl-Rast, *Gratefulness*, TedTalks.com, accessed 12/2012

³² Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands Building Loving Christian Community Building Bridges to Friends and Neighbors*, (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1993)

Participants were encouraged to consider that their being at Mott Haven is not by chance but a divine assignment. Two illustrations from the video, *The Scroll* were shared to drive home the point. In the first story, Bishop Hezekiah Walker related the story of one concert performance where he and his choir really didn't want to go. They had just released an album and were in great demand. They had been travelling non-stop and their heart just wasn't in it. But since the date had already been booked, they went anyway and ministered to the crowd in their usual fashion. After the concert a woman handed Bishop Walker an envelope with a letter in it. The letter basically said that she was suicidal and had already written another letter to her parents apologizing and asking them to take care of her children. But because of the choir's ministry that night, she decided she didn't have to kill herself and that she could make it through. "What if we had decided to cancel?" said Bishop Walker, "What if?" It was a reminder to Bishop Walker and the choir that God has appointed our steps and we need to be in the position God has placed us in. The second story was from Bishop Vashti Makenzie who shared how she had lost a child. Bishop Makenzie was six months pregnant when the child was born and died a few hours later. Not even a whole year later a member of her congregation went through the same thing except her child didn't die. The Bishop began to question God as she watched the couple walk into service with their baby. God told her it was a trial that she could bear, but the woman would not have been able to handle it. God told her that this trial was necessary in order to prepare her to minister to this woman and others who would experience this devastating tragedy³³. We never know when God will choose to use us or who may be strengthened by the word of our testimony.

At the close of the workshop participants were queried about what learning they would take away. As we went around the room and the group shared what they had learned, one person in particular said that after watching the video on gratefulness, he would use the traffic light as his

³³ Bishop Paul Morton, et al, *The Scroll When Real Problems Meet Real Faith*, DVD. Produced by Parrish Smith, Mountainview: Swea Pee Films in association with Vision 6 Media, 2012.

metaphor for stopping, looking and listening before he proceeded so that he might be more intentional about loving one another, embracing others and respecting their humanity as well as their diversity.

As a final component in the teaching strategy, in January of 2014, the leaders of the church will go through spiritual gifts training based on the Network Discovery Program developed by Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins and Bill Hybels.³⁴ Exploring scripture to discover what it says about spiritual gifts, the program's philosophy is: *the right people, in the right place at the right time for the right reasons*. The goal of the 12 hour workshop is that by using the gifts God has given them people will fulfill God's purpose for the lives; and once that happens, the church and the people will become what God intended them to be.

³⁴ Bruce Bugbee, *Network Discovery Workshop Revised*, 3rd Ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005)

CHAPTER 5: PLANNING AND COLLABORATION

The leadership committee met at least ten times during the scope of this project. The group is made up of the pastor and leaders from Mott Haven. Two people from the community who do not belong to Mott Haven but who support and participate in church activities were invited to be a part. One is middle-aged Hispanic male and the other is a young West Indian female minister in her thirties. The purpose of the committee is to assist the pastor in developing and carrying out strategic goals. Various community partners were invited to speak to the committee. A youth pastor whose ministry is based on Jesus' saying "I will make you fishers of men" made a presentation to the committee, warning that if Mott Haven is to make youth a priority that they need to be truly ready to accept whatever comes back in the fishing net otherwise they should not attempt it. Many of the youth who have come to her church over the past year, have never even been inside the sanctuary. Next a Hispanic pastor came to tell us that you only need to start with what you have if you are trying to connect with the Hispanic community. He has successfully built up several congregations and pledged his support and assistance to Mott Haven. Specifically he promised to loan us Hispanic chaplains and ministers to help us with our Evangelism Sundays.

The committee also went on retreat to develop strategic goals in response to the church's Vision and Mission Statements. There are five main mission strategies: advocacy for the voiceless, creating centers of learning; making a safe haven for youth; bringing healing and peace to the community; and feeding the community physically and spiritually.

In August of 2013, the pastor challenged the leadership group by asking the following questions: “How does Mott Haven become the church outside of the church? How do we engage the community on a real and authentic level? How do we practice being the hands, the feet, eyes and ears and mouthpiece of God in the streets of Mott Haven?” One of the ways the church answered that challenge was by having a community block party. The event occurred in September 2013. It was a real coming together of the community. A young Hispanic woman from the community came to the leadership committee and offered her assistance in planning the event. Several people from the community served on the various teams. At least 16 local community organizations participated. Neighbors came out and helped to set up the event and clean up afterward. The block party featured free popcorn, hot dogs and snow cones, face painting, board games, music, a drumming circle and dancing. At least 200 people attended the event. While no hard data is available on the percentage of Hispanic neighbors who attended all agree that they were well represented. A fair amount of children were also in attendance. Overall it was a successful event and the neighbors are already asking when the next one will be. This type of event is another example of the relational activity that needs to occur. Recently, the pastor shared that a local businessman who was at the block party, was so happy to see the church “doing something” out in the community that he donated the use of his storefront to the church at no cost. He even remarked that there is a marked difference on the street now, “it’s cleaned up and its quieter.”

Another event, Family and Friends Day occurred in August. It is a chance for us to really employ intentional hospitality. The church purchased a certain amount of meat and drinks and the congregants each contributed a dish, a dessert or other item. Everything was loaded up and taken to a local park where we hung our banner to identify ourselves and sat back to enjoy the day. Invariably there are other events going on in the park, but none have free food. As we began to barbeque the smell wafted over the park and soon there are many curious onlookers. At first the church members were a bit stand offish and told anyone who asked that the food was for

us. Church leaders however began to demonstrate what the appropriate behavior was and starting inviting anyone who looked hungry over to get a meal. Pretty soon the congregants caught on and there was a great crowd of people who were so grateful. It began to be a fun time and at the end of the day we all left with a feeling of satisfaction; that we had done what God would have us to do. We fed many who spoke just enough English to say the food was good and told others about it. We fed three well dressed and well groomed young men who turned out to be homeless. We fed people who were clearly on drugs who asked for prayer and wanted to stop using. We fed them, we talked to them, we prayed with them and we fellowshiped with them.

Mott Haven launched its food pantry in September of 2012. It operated on Saturdays for three months. The goal was to operate for three months and then qualify for membership in the New York City food bank. Prior to the launch a team was formed and they underwent training in Servant Leadership with strong emphasis on hospitality and basic food pantry operations. During the course of pantry operations we offered hospitality to them through beverages, cookies and candies while they were waiting for their food distribution. Prayer and inspirational booklets were introduced and the patrons were very receptive to our efforts. A quick survey of the patrons showed that the majority of them were Hispanic. It was on this basis that we decided we might be able to confirm what the leadership committee believed it had heard from the community via a survey of what the patrons thought were the top issues facing the Mott Haven community, their wants and needs. We also hoped to draw interested patrons into pantry operations as well as a community advisory group. After applying for membership to the food bank we learned that we had not been open enough and that we should have opened the pantry at least once a week, every week for three months. This was a significantly higher financial commitment than the church could meet and so the pantry closed until we could secure the finances to meet the trial period. That meant we had to alter our strategy in this area, if we were to achieve our objectives. The pantry is scheduled to re-open in Spring 2014.

A community survey was designed to seek the answers not only to the issues the community faced but to also identify what the community would like to see in terms of programming at the church and identify what their social media habits were.(See Appendix 10) The survey also looked to identify anyone who might be interested in forming a community advisory group to 1) work on community issues; 2) work on church programming or 3) staff and run a food pantry. Preliminary findings suggest: 50% of residents surveyed were of Hispanic descent, 31% were Black. 56% were under the age of 26. Most of the people are concentrated in zip codes 10454 and 10455. Residents are very concerned about their community. Homelessness ranks number one on the list of concerns, followed by unemployment, guns, crime, substance abuse and gangs. At least 50% participated in the block party, 31% had visited the food pantry, 22% had been to a Sunday Worship Service. Of note, 68% report never coming to the church, 56% know of the church but do not know the name of the church. Yet 81% say they have been invited to an event at Mott Haven and 56% say there is nothing that keeps them from going. When asked about the kinds of programs and activities they might be interested in, survey respondents listed the top ten as (in rank order): Food Pantry; Community Meals; Family Movie Nights; Family & Friends Day; Health Care Sign Up; Mothers Group; Exercise; Job Training; Special Worship Services and Art Classes For Youth .

A proposal was also drafted to launch a social justice ministry through the formation of an advisory council. (See Appendix 9) The first step is to identify potential members through the community survey (3 were identified); and then to take them through spiritual gift training, negotiation and conflict resolution training, collaboration and civic participation training. The committee will be quarterly and report back to the leadership committee. Members of the advisory council will be asked to represent Mott Haven on the various local boards and commissions, work together to design community based solutions to identified community issues; and to staff and manage our food pantry. The proposal was approved by the Mott Haven Reformed Church Consistory in September of 2013.

In furtherance of its strategic goals, the church has formed partnerships with the Community Connections for Youth – a youth advocacy program; the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies; the New York Faith Based Initiative, the Bronx Clergy Roundtable, the College of New Rochelle, New Brunswick Seminary, the Cardinal McCloskey Foster Care Agency and New Life New York City, a youth programming organization.

CHAPTER 6: LIVING BIBLE ENGAGEMENT

Drawing upon Acts 2:6-11, we asked the question, “How do we overcome barriers to cross cultural communication while utilizing Bible engagement to effectively deliver the message of the gospel?” The most obvious thing that we can do is to create opportunities for our Hispanic neighbors to hear the gospel, to hear “the wonders of God” declared in their own language. It is important for the Hispanic community to feel that they are welcomed and included and most importantly that this gospel is for them. As happened in Acts after Peter’s epic sermon, hearing it in their own language added to the church in great numbers. Having a bilingual youth minister or intern or even a transplant from a partner church will go a long way in helping to achieve this strategy. Bilingual outreach teams going out to invite the community to bilingual services, is another activity designed to achieve this particular strategy. A recent study by the Barna Group suggests that 48% of Hispanics prefer to go to a church that is bilingual as opposed to 25% who favored a Spanish only church³⁵.

Another critical factor in relating to the Hispanic community is to understand the cultural nuances and ways in which an intended meaning can get lost in translation. It means making sure that the message of the Bible as preached is received in exactly the way it is delivered but also the way it was intended. This is particularly important as we try to answer both how meaning is made and how meaning is mediated. We will have to use our understanding of cultural difference to engage the Bible in ways that are relevant to both cultures. The Barna study also suggests that while only 8% of Hispanics can be said to be engaged biblically, overall, “Hispanics’ high regard

³⁵ Barna:Hispanics, *Hispanic America, Faith, Values and Priorities*. (Ventura: Barna Group, 2012) 91.

for Scripture suggests that they could be more easily “tipped” toward Bible engagement...³⁶,

Thus there is an exciting opportunity for a joining and a blending of cultures to create something new and vibrant.

Bible storytelling offers us the chance to engage with both the Hispanic and general populations in meaningful ways while re-energizing the congregation at Mott Haven. Bible storytelling is the art of weaving together the biblical story with the personal and everyday stories of our lives. There is something profound that happens when Scripture is told from this very personal perspective as opposed to just a recitation from a book. Mainline churches all over the nation are struggling with ways in which to stay relevant. The Mott Haven congregation is no different than the rest. Peter Morgan theorizes that *koinonia* or fellowship while vital, has become the dominant activity in many of these mainline churches and that it is more important for the *kerygma* or the preaching to be timely, personal and relevant³⁷. Biblical storytelling is the vehicle through which that can be achieved.

We set about creating opportunities for understanding by hosting a Hispanic minister at Mott Haven every fourth Sunday, dubbed “Evangelism Sunday” from April through October. The first guest was from Christ the King, a Honduran church in the Bronx. The assistant pastor preached in Spanish, then a translator communicated to the congregation in English. He brought his worship leader who sang in both English and Spanish. They also brought their drummer who added a liveliness to the service. A number of the members of their congregation also came. Afterwards there was a general feeling that this method was unwieldy and added unnecessary length to the service. Despite the statistics to support our assumption that the Hispanic community needed to hear the gospel in their native language, our first experience told

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Peter M. Morgan, *Story Weaving: Using Stories to Transform Your Congregation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1990), 47.

us a different story. The pastor of Mott Haven thought the service was prolonged by the bilingual format. Dr. Emilo Reyes, director of multi-language ministries at the American Bible Society, and who has planted at least 12 churches, suggested that it would be better to have English speaking services that incorporate Spanish nuances and have a separate all Spanish speaking service. His point was that bilingual services for the bilingual person is cumbersome because they are essentially hearing everything twice; moreover if you are trying to go after young Hispanics, they generally speak English no matter what level their competency. On the other hand, if you want to reach older Hispanics, then an all Spanish speaking service would be the way to go.

The fellowship hour following the service went well, with members of Mott Haven actually interacting with the visitors. One could assume this was because they looked like the congregants; yet cultural differences remain even amongst Black people. This is a common mistake that is made when we try to homogenize our differences. Instead of embracing and celebrating our differences, we try to make everyone the same, operating blindly in our own biases – a fatal flaw of multiculturalism. “Multiculturalism is a body of thought in political philosophy about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity. Mere toleration of group differences is said to fall short of treating members of minority groups as equal citizens; recognition and positive accommodation of group differences are required through “group-differentiated rights,” a term coined by Will Kymlicka (1995).³⁸” After conferring with other pastors we decided that a bilingual service was not the best approach.

The next Evangelism Sunday a young male Hispanic minister came. He was very personable and as previously mentioned he had gone out into the community with us the day before. The congregation took to him and were very enthusiastic about him. They enjoyed his sermon and gave him verbal support which is unusual for them. They fussed over him at the

³⁸ Stamford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/multiculturalism/>, accessed 12/11/2013

fellowship hour and invited him to return. In fact the reception of this young man was so positive that he was invited to preach a second time. Several other Hispanic ministers came during the course of this project. The congregation was equally receptive.

Unfortunately, no one from the community has come to date, despite passing out bilingual invitations. Trying to increase our visibility with our Hispanic neighbors, this is a disappointment, but we recognize that this will take time. The important thing is for us to be out there so that people can see us and begin to recognize us. We know this is true just based on our experiences with Family and Friends Day. Now when we walk down the street, the people we feed in the park do recognize us and call out a friendly greeting. As it happens there is group of Hispanic men and women who sort of hang out on Third Avenue, near the church's parking lot. "Poppy" as he is affectionately called, is the mayor of the street selling his avocados and holding court. He looks out for the pastor and other females who come in and out the parking lot and has trained everyone else who gathers there to do the same. When asked why they won't come to service, they replied, "Look mommy, we believe in God, we do, but we not coming inside, *but we are listening.*"

This is so important for us to understand as we think about cross-cultural communication. Our relationship with Poppy has evolved over the last year mainly because we have made a conscious effort to engage him in conversation, to inquire about his well-being, and to invite him to service and other events. This is not only cross cultural communication, this is engaging in cross cultural experience! At Christmastime, we decided to give Poppy a card and some chocolates with some cash inside. I passed by several times that day, and were touched when I noticed Poppy clutching that card. From then on, anytime he sees us at the gate he makes it his business to come unlock it, and wait for us to come out and secures the parking lot for us. There have been times when it appears as if Poppy materialized out of nowhere! That's how serious he takes his "job" and everyone in his court is equally conscientious.

On a very basic level this is about creating relationships yet it is much more than that. Poppy now knows that we appreciate him, we honor him and we accept him. Our small token at Christmas meant the world to him. It is okay if he never comes inside, we can still minister to him, right where he is. Another of Poppy's friends who also helped out with the gate began showing signs of illness. The most disturbing symptom was that his hands were grossly swollen. When we came outside he was laying on the ground, passed out. Alarmed, we went to him and tried to see if he was okay. Poppy reassured us that he was and told us to just leave him. Now what we didn't know was that the young man had started using heroin. When he found himself in trouble, he came to Poppy who watched over him. Thankfully he did recover, and when they told him how concerned we were about him, he made sure to come and tell us that he was okay. We had made a connection with him and the fact that he was using drugs made no difference. Once again it was about ministering to someone in a non-judgmental maybe even an unorthodox way.

Likewise the security guard at the church is a young Hispanic. He is a very dedicated young man who goes out of his way to help the church. He doesn't actually work for the church except on Sunday mornings. Prior to my coming to Mott Haven, Danny notoriously would not set foot inside the sanctuary. But a curious thing happened. When we launched the food pantry in the Fall of 2012, 90% of the patrons were Hispanic. Danny watched how we treated them. Prior to the launch, we had done some intensive training around servant leadership. Operating rules were developed and strict instructions were given on how patrons were to be treated as well as conflict resolution. Patrons were offered cookies, candy, hot apple cider, coffee and tea. Recognizing that Danny has a young family, we made sure that he not only got a distribution from the pantry, but that he always got a little extra in recognition of all that he does for the church. Pretty soon Danny was coming into the sanctuary to have a meal with us! Eventually he even let us celebrate his birthday with him.

One day just as we were about to leave, an elderly woman was mistakenly dropped off at the church by a medical van. She was confused about where she was supposed to go. Danny

went out of his way to help her. He called several places and could be overheard saying that *his* church was about to close. Another time when a homeless couple came to the church looking for help, Danny again claimed Mott Haven as his church and told the couple how well he is treated by the church. Once again, it is his personal connection to the people in the church that has affected the transformation in Danny. He may not ever become a member in the traditional sense, but for all intents and purposes, Danny is a part of Mott Haven. He too is listening and watching. One of Mott Haven's goals is to be the incarnate presence of Jesus Christ in the community. These are but a few examples of how we practically do it "unto the least of these." Over the long run, it will be establishing these kinds of relationships that will give the church credibility among the Hispanic community. Planting these seeds of unity will eventually lead to having Hispanics as members of the church. Until then we must be willing to be the church outside of the four walls of the building, in ways that don't look like how we are used to doing it.

Over the course of this project we had very few visitors, let alone Hispanics on a Sunday morning – an average of eight annually in 2011, 2012 and 2013. (See Appendix 11) As it turned out, our contact with this population was mainly through our food pantry and special events, such as the Community Block Party and Family and Friends Day. Looking at visitors tracked for the past three years suggests that the block party had the most contact with over 200 persons attending a single event but only 50 visitor cards were returned. No data is available on the number of Hispanics identified. The food pantry was next with a total of 307 patrons. It should be noted that a number of those patrons were repeat guests over the three months of operation. The actual number of patrons is estimated at 180. What we do know however, is that over 90% of those patrons were Hispanic. Our Annual Thanksgiving meal came in third with at least 60 visitors; followed by our Family and Friends Day with 58; again in both cases visitors were 90% Hispanic.

Another goal focused on employing biblical storytelling in Spanish and English; and use of Spanish speaking translators whenever possible in "reading" the text. The storytelling was

scheduled to occur as a part of bilingual worship services held every fourth Sunday. We decided against having a bilingual service as previously noted. However, the idea of having a dedicated Spanish only service is still a future goal. Interestingly, in years past Mott Haven did have both a Spanish worship service and a Spanish Bible study. In addition we plan to link this to our partnership with the Cardinal McCloskey Foster Care Agency through the Faith Based Initiative. The Initiative links an intern to a creative arts program called “Peace through Ubuntu” for young people aged 12-17 who are in or impacted by the foster care system in the South Bronx. The goal is to create a safe space for youth to build community, receive emotional support, critically engage and explore contemporary justice issues through the spirit of Ubuntu – “I am what I am because of who we all are.” Through theatre, music, dance, and story-telling, participants would also explore what the Scriptures have to say about our world. Those who are willing would have the opportunity to present the Scriptures “live” before the congregation. We are awaiting the assignment of an intern so that this part of the project can begin.

Over 300 grant sources were screened for possible funding to employ a bilingual youth minister. The objective was to have this person(s) in place before the end of 2013. Unfortunately, we could not identify any funding for a position such as this. The church did make the decision to hire a part-time bilingual intern anyway. The position postings were circulated amongst RCA churches, on Craigslist, and Facebook. The heaviest response came from Craigslist with 25 applicants. Resumes are being screened as of this writing and hopefully we will achieve this objective by Spring of 2014. Additionally, our efforts to recruit a “transplant” from a Hispanic congregation to assist with cross cultural communication for one year were not successful, those that we approached were unwilling to leave their home church for that length of time. Nor were we able to get Hispanic chaplains assigned to us as had been promised by some local Hispanic pastors. To be fair, it was less of a reluctance to help us and more as though everybody was just too busy handling their own calendars.

CHAPTER 7: INTO THE DEEP WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

The Bible challenges us not to forget the assembling of ourselves. Today, people are “assembling” themselves more and more via social media. The challenge for the church is to understand that Christ is Lord of all, including the space that social media occupies. Therefore the church must be present in that space. Mainline churches especially must learn this lesson if they are to compete with the myriad streams of information that demand our attention. Our world has forever changed, we are no longer a society where everyone goes to Sunday morning worship together while businesses and everything else is closed because it is Sunday and our work week has ended on Friday. Jesus went to where the people are, and so must the church. The impact of modern technology and social media cannot be understated. We live in the digital age, where the need for information that is constantly updated is almost a requirement. Tapping into this social phenomenon will enable Mott Haven to reach the immediate community and beyond. Colossians 4:5 tells us that we must be wise in the way that we act toward outsiders, and that we are to make the most of every opportunity.

The reality for Mott Haven, however, was that creating a greater awareness of and interest in Mott Haven through the use of 21st century technology proved to be beyond our current capacity. The leadership committee investigated the use of live streaming as a way to connect with people who don't come to worship service and to promote the special programming that we do so much of. We met with a media consultant who helped us explore what our options might be. He suggested that we put together a dedicated team that could capture the Sunday worship service as well as any special events we were having. The team would have to do some editing but we could actually record events ourselves and transfer them to CDs which in turn could be

sold or posted on YouTube. The cost of the equipment to do this was approximately \$4,000. A great idea but beyond what Mott Haven could do both in terms of manpower and cost. The consultant also suggested we try putting a promo on YouTube and offered a 30 day trial. The pastor did the promo but it came and went with no appreciable notice by anyone.

We next turned to a Christian marketing firm LAS Consulting, with over 20 years in the business that specialized in developing marketing plans, growth strategies, E-blast services and design of all things related to media for churches, i.e., postcards, letterhead, banners, flyers, stationery, logos, websites and newsletters. We were especially interested in the E-blast service which sends out flyers and other kinds of notices of events and services within the church community. The company also has an entertainment and concert promotion division. After spending a few months getting to know us as we got familiar with the company, it became clear once again that at this point and time, a marketing plan of this caliber would be beyond our reach. However, he did offer a free assessment. His recommendations:

- “Radical change is needed - who you say you are going after is not who you really are going after. Look at what you are doing to go after them? Youth beget youth, senior citizens do not attract youth. What attracts young people? Don't go after the youth or Hispanics unless you are ready to receive them and embrace them just the way they are. Mott Haven will have to adapt to attract the population you want; or decide to stay who you are and market outside of your geographical area and have people to come to you. It's a conscious decision you have to make.
- There is a difference between ministry and membership. You can do ministry in the community all you want to. Do we want members or just to do ministry? Just because I give someone food doesn't mean they are going to unite with us nor should we expect it. You cannot do ministry alone without members. Mott Haven must put membership first. The harvest is ripe but the laborers are few.

The community is ready to harvest whenever you get enough people to do the work. Jesus could not have changed the world without the 12 disciples. Too many churches have this same mentality. The focus is on ministry, ministry, and more ministry. Build the membership first. If you keep going, you will burn out or kill off the ones you have left. You need more people so that you can go on.

- You have visitors coming there? Why aren't they staying? Go after your visitors and make them feel like they are valuable to you. Embrace your visitors. Let them know their value to you. Capture their mind versus their heart. Let them know that this is a church that works and then demonstrate that by the work that you do.
- Focus on one thing at a time. If you have too many targets, it's confusing. The pastor has to be organized and focused. Keep it simple. Some things you are not ready to do yet. You are not big enough. Let your church be known for the thing you focus on. People saw the work that Jesus did and the miracles he performed and they said, who are you? And they wanted to follow him. Let your church do the work, perform the miracles and let the people want to follow you.
- What does the church do best? Evaluate the core team - what are their strengths? What can you count on the membership to do? What are your strengths? Build upon your strengths.”

I also consulted with Ms. Catherine Ortiz, our technical advisor who works for Marble Collegiate, a very large RCA church in Manhattan. At Marble Collegiate they have a web site and they utilize live streaming. Sermons can be archived and accessed at any time. The most popular features are the daily blog with the Pastor and online Bible study. All of their events and schedules are posted to the website. They have videos, pictures and links to their Facebook page.

Users can post comments or requests and someone from the church can respond. They use Google Analytics to track traffic to the website. The church can receive donations through the website by having a donate button that is linked to PayPal. Users can make an annual pledge, a one-time donation or even choose to honor someone by making a donation in their name.

Her recommendations for Mott Haven: An interactive website would be an efficient way for the church to reach out to the wider community and possibly young people. Establishing a Twitter account would enable the church to engage in real time conversations. It could even be used for Bible study. WordPress is a popular and inexpensive web page design vehicle for churches. Mott Haven's goal should be to share the experience of Mott Haven with others through social media. She suggested we purchase a flip camera to record the pastor's sermons, capture special events and create a video blog. Once we have videos we can upload them to Facebook and YouTube, using their nonprofit link. PayPal also has a donation feature for non-profits. Her strongest advice: forget trying to do traditional marketing. Forget trying to link to Spanish media. We don't have the people or the money. Besides, the best way to advertise in that community is by word of mouth. Mott Haven needs to get out into the community and do a lot of relational activity. Mott Haven is the kind of place where everybody comes outside to share what is going on. (As it happens, Ms. Ortiz grew up in the Mott Haven community.) The church needs to get out there. That is what will get people to be interested in the church.

With our financial constraints the question became "How do we do what we know needs to be done without capital and without manpower?" Here is where faith becomes an essential component of strategic planning. The Word of God reminds us that we should not be weary in well doing. If we persevere, God will give us the harvest in due season if we don't give up. Although we may not be able to achieve it today, we continue to work toward our goals, planting seeds and waiting for God. In this we do not have a choice; after 162 years we cannot give up. "Churches don't have the luxury of withdrawing from the community. Whether they feel wanted or not, churches must realize that the community cannot be healthy and all that God wants it to

be, without their active engagement and involvement in its life – that’s the way God designed it.³⁹”

Using a carefully thought out and defined strategy for reaching the Hispanic community is a real and necessary objective. Using 21st century technology to enhance those efforts is also real and necessary. What is still needed is a “cultural strategy that works across languages and delivers a consistent cultural message to Hispanic consumers in Spanish and English, as specific audience needs require.”⁴⁰ This kind of strategy would be a logical progression in Mott Haven’s goal to embrace the Hispanic population. Effectively reaching the people where they are, becoming intimately familiar and involved in the community, avoiding stereotypes, and ensuring that Mott Haven’s message is both delivered and received in ways that are culturally relevant will be critical to outreach efforts. “Today people from many nations have come to our cities and communities, and God has mandated that the church bring the gospel to our communities. The calling of the church is clear.”⁴¹

Being a church for the 21st century means getting beyond the four walls of the church. Struggling churches will have to change their paradigm if they are going to survive over the next 15 years. Sunday morning worship cannot be the primary activity anymore. It needs to be one of a number of options. Case in point, one day Danny, our Hispanic security guard asked why we didn’t have a website or a Twitter account. He mentioned that he frequently tuned in to online broadcasts of different churches and would be very interested if Mott Haven had that capability. According to Danny, there are many people like himself, “who don’t want to be hypocrites by coming in the church, but who want to make a connection to a church. Eventually after they

³⁹ Rick Rusaw, Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church*, (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2004) 58.

⁴⁰ Felipe Korzenny and Betty Ann Korzenny, *Hispanic Marketing: a Cultural Perspective* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005), 113.

⁴¹ Rick Rusaw, Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church*, (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2004) 58.

listen long enough they may decide to come.” Here again is where relational activity if you pay attention, can make the difference. There is a group of people who need to be ministered to, who aren’t in the pews.

At the same time, Mott Haven’s desire is to reach the younger generation. An updated Facebook page and interactive website along with a Twitter account puts the church within the sphere where so much of mainstream culture now lives. Specifically having a Twitter account can help us reach a younger audience. A 2013 Pew Research Study on teens and social media suggests that Twitter use amongst teens has doubled since 2011. Of teens surveyed 94% use both Twitter and Facebook although teens, “have waning enthusiasm for Facebook disliking the increasing adult presence, people sharing excessively and stressful drama but they keep using it because participation is an important part of overall teenage socializing.⁴²” Hopeful, we launched our Twitter account in late 2013. There are less than 50 followers at present. Most of the followers are people who know the pastor. Promoting our Twitter account is one step in what has to be an overall plan. Like Facebook we have to utilize the interconnectedness and sphere of influence of each of our followers to gain a wider audience. Looking at the Pew report it occurs to me that this strategy may not get us what we desire. If we really want to understand what a younger audience might be attracted to, we need to go to the source. We may need to look at a survey mechanism on the website and/or through our Twitter account.

Financial constraints delayed the launch of the website until early 2014. After reviewing the top ten website builders we selected one that would give us an easy to use website design along with web hosting as well as a search engine friendly site and e-commerce functionality for less than \$200 for 24 months. It features a blog space and multi-channel support so we could have multiple emails associated with the website, a free domain name, and most important a 90 day money back guarantee. The drawback to this program is that you use a template to create

⁴² Internet and American Life Project, *Teens, Social Media and Privacy*, (Washington D.C.: The Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, 2013) 5.

your website and those templates cannot be manipulated. WordPress on the other hand is really a program that people use to create both blogs and websites. It gives you a lot more flexibility, but you have to be a lot more advanced to use WordPress.

Establishing a Mott Haven blog will allow the church to tell its story, share updates to its ministries and programming, capture Sunday services, and special events. This an area where we still need to do some work. Because we are so small in numbers, there isn't yet a person who has been identified as the one who would update and maintain the Twitter account, blog and website. The pastor is not opposed to the idea but can't be the one who does it. An intern is the most likely solution or the leaders will have to take it on as a shared responsibility. That will mean pushing ourselves beyond our comfort zone to learn how to navigate around in this new technology. One thing is for certain, it will take the church beyond its four walls, remove the barriers of time and place and make the church available to its followers on a twenty-four hour basis. Moreover there is no limit to the number of followers we can have.

Once we are successful in getting a bilingual youth minister and can establish Spanish language worship and Bible studies we can look to live streaming those as well. Research shows that more and more Hispanic households are becoming bilingual, even if every family member isn't. This is another area where the use of an intern might be beneficial. The downside of course is that interns are temporary so that consistency might suffer.

We also consulted with Pastor Eure of GodStreaming.com. The pastor says that God has given him the mission to make live streaming affordable for all churches. For a minimal fee, a camera, adapter and Web 2.0 software, we can upload and archive videos through his website. But as Pastor Eure pointed out, it does no good to establish a store in a strip mall and no one knows you are there. What we need is a website, live streaming, a Youtube page, a Facebook page *and* a Twitter account all connected to each other so as to drive traffic to our site. An online prayer room and/or a survey poll a couple of methods that could be used to generate interest.

CHAPTER 8: PROJECT SUMMARY

As with any project there is theory and then there is actual practice; so I offer this caveat. One of the things I quickly learned is that the church is a living, breathing, changing organization that does not necessarily adhere to planned schedules and activities. The lives of the members, issues with the physical plant and plain old money constraints can get in the way. Launching a project and putting it into the daily rhythm of the church requires flexibility to say the least. Some of the strategies developed had to be modified and timeframes adjusted as we went along. In initiating such a project one must also consider that it must fit in with the vision of the senior pastor. Becoming a part of the church (I became an Elder and the Executive Assistant to the Pastor) as opposed to being just an observer also has an impact and I learned a lot along the way, particularly about surviving against the odds. Not everything that I envisioned was appropriate for this congregation at this time. Some of what I thought based on current research turned out not to be true. Moreover, change is difficult. Real transformation doesn't happen quickly and certainly not within a year's time. This is where faith meets praxis. This project as it turns out is about a small urban church, surviving in the place where the travelers met the resurrected Christ while on their journey, a faithful remnant holding on while adapting to change. For Mott Haven, this project is an ongoing endeavor, planting seeds for the harvest to come. With that said, the following is a review of the original goals, strategies and methodologies along with intended outcomes and evaluation.

GOAL 1: Create a shared vision for transformation for the Mott Haven congregation & the Hispanic community of Mott Haven through mutuality of purpose.

Strategies:

- 1.A. Explore the Belhar Confession as adopted by the Reformed Church in America, and its practical implementation as it relates to “embracing the other.”
- 1.B. Raise the level of awareness of Christian hospitality as a lost art and the need for demonstrating intentional hospitality through a four week Bible study
- 1.C. Form a community partner group for collaboration on identified community issues/priorities, utilizing the current leadership group and inviting selected community partners to participate.

Methodologies:

*Pre and post activity congregational surveys to evaluate possible changes in behavior patterns;

*Interviews with church leaders as a means of establishing a baseline of opinions and attitudes.

*Measure attendance and participation at Bible studies for overall compliance;

*Review relevant case studies for further insight.

Intended Outcomes:

Creation of programs and spaces where the congregation and the community can experience hospitality and employ it as a precursor to any evangelistic thrust;

Creation of programs and spaces where the congregation and the community can experience “the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions as well as the various languages and cultures that are, by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God”;

- Creation of a shared vision for the Mott Haven community;

- Redirected behavior from old patterns to modeling of desired behavior;
- Increase fellowship with our Hispanic neighbors;
- Increase the church's credibility within the Hispanic community;
- Creation of a mechanism that will enable the church to address community issues.

Evaluation

Over the course of the project the Bible study series on the Belhar Confession and workshop on hospitality were completed although much later than when originally contemplated. Attendance and participation hovered around 64%. A proposal for the creation an advisory group built upon the current leadership group was crafted and approved by the church's governing council. The formation of the actual advisory group is pending following the identification of interested persons via a community survey. Thus implementation of at least one community priority is also pending. The four methodologies planned were utilized: Measurement of attendance and participation in the Bible studies; interviews with church leaders were conducted, pre and post surveys were also done. An in-depth profile for both the pastor and congregation was completed with 90% participation. Case studies of the Mid-Bronx Desperadoes and the New Community Corporation were reviewed and updated for insight.

Did we achieve our intended outcomes? Certainly the proposed model for the advisory council will be the mechanism by which the church can fulfill its mission of being an advocate for the voiceless and allow the church to address community issues. This type of forum will go a long way in helping the church to truly create a shared vision while establishing further credibility among the Hispanic neighbors as well as the greater community. Over the past year the church has worked hard to increase its fellowship with the Hispanic community through its various programs and activities. Re-establishing the food pantry and having it run by community people will also go a long way in solidifying the church's relationship to the Hispanic community.

Leaders have consistently modeled desired behavior in terms of intentional hospitality and we have witnessed first-hand redirected behaviors. However we recognize that to sustain this

change in behavior a strong emphasis on intentional hospitality along with teaching and tips on how to practice it, must be ongoing. The notion that true hospitality is a precursor to evangelism still needs to take root. For a few brief periods we can say that we created the space where we could appreciate and enjoy the diversity of the human race as a gift to the church. Congregants overwhelmingly report that they now believe in justice as it is articulated in the Belhar Confession. For this congregation, that is real learning. To take it a step further and understand that we each bear a responsibility toward our brother and sister would be a likely and desirable progression. That we are all divinely ordained to be in this place at this time with each other to do a work together is a lesson that must be taught over and over and over. This goal remains a work in progress.

GOAL 2: Create opportunities for understanding cultural differences by incorporating Hispanic culture and language into ministry programming at Mott Haven

Strategies:

- 2.A. Capitalize on oral tradition within Hispanic culture by employing biblical storytelling in Spanish and use of Spanish speaking translators whenever possible in “reading” the text.
- 2.B. Use grant funding and/or other creative ways to employ bilingual youth minister, intern or “transplant” from a Hispanic congregation to assist with cross cultural communication.
- 2.C. Create ecumenical opportunities for bilingual services and bilingual evangelistic outreach through collaboration with Spanish speaking congregations,

Methodologies:

- *Measure number of Hispanic visitors to determine effectiveness of activity;
- *Conduct follow up visitor surveys to measure satisfaction levels employing the Willingness, Understanding and Action Assessment Tool;
- *Measure involvement of Hispanic ministers/chaplains/interns to determine the effect on outreach efforts;
- *Measure number of bilingual worship services to determine the effect on outreach efforts;
- *Measure number of bilingual evangelism team outreaches to determine the effect on outreach efforts;

Intended Outcomes:

- Increased understanding of Hispanic culture and language;
- Engagement with the Bible in an appropriate cultural context
- Hispanic community hears and sees someone speaking/preaching in their own language;
- A more “bilingual” congregation in that they are familiar with and can converse at a minimal level in basic Spanish;
- Established “bridge” to Hispanic youth in the community via transplant, intern or bilingual youth minister;
- Increased attractiveness of Mott Haven Church to Hispanic community and increase visibility within the community.

Evaluation:

Bi-lingual Bible story-telling is yet to be established as a means of outreach to the Hispanic community. We determined that this particular strategy was premature. For Mott Haven right now, it is a question of manpower; there simply are not enough people to pull this off at the present time. The alternative is to establish an interactive link on our soon to be created web page. We have also decided to connect biblical storytelling to our partnership with the Cardinal McCloskey Foster Care Program. The idea is that if we link it to children, then families will be motivated to come and hear their children and thus be favorably disposed toward the church. Another possibility is to use videos to convey the message of Scripture.

The idea of bilingual worship services was abandoned in favor of having bilingual ministers as guest preachers once a month. Evangelism Sundays occurred every fourth Sunday for six months. It turned out to be a very positive experience for the congregation and a definite shift in their behavior occurred.

In terms of methodologies used, since there were no new Hispanic visitors as a result of our outreach efforts, a review of visitor cards for 2011, 2012 and 2013 was undertaken. The analysis showed that Sunday morning worship services was the least effective for reaching this population. Clearly the more relational activities like the Community Block Party, Family & Friends Day and the Food Pantry had the greatest impact which could be said to have increased Mott Haven's attractiveness and visibility. We had 100% participation on the part of Hispanic and/or bilingual ministers with us for our Evangelism Sundays; over the course of seven months there were six.

The church is presently recruiting for a bilingual youth minister, however we were unable to secure grant funding. Our partnership with the Cardinal McCloskey Agency and the Faith Based Initiative will bring us at least one intern. The church has made the decision to hire a bilingual youth minister part time. The combination of these two persons will provide the "bridge" to the Hispanic community and will assist the congregation in obtaining a greater

cultural understanding. The position description for the part-time youth minister as written, requires the person to help teach conversational Spanish to the congregation.

Bilingual evangelism efforts to the community had mixed results. Bilingual invitations were passed out for five out of the seven months. Efforts to collaborate with other churches to create bilingual outreach teams failed. Although many churches were supportive of the idea, all of them were simply too busy with their own programming. Bilingual invitations were created instead and passed out to people on the streets. On the one hand the community got used to seeing us out there and were receptive to the invitations; on the other hand no one actually came to Sunday worship service as a result. Mott Haven did create brochures about the church in Spanish and purchased inspirational booklets in Spanish. The church plans to purchase Spanish Bibles in 2014. Intended outcomes in this area can be measured once the planned strategies are in place.

GOAL 3: Create greater awareness of, and interest in the Mott Haven Church through the use of 21st century technology

Strategies:

- 3.A. Design new website and new Facebook page, using social media to provide updates and announcements
- 3.B. Design promo and links to You Tube, Spanish media outlets created as a means of engaging social media to increase the visibility of Mott Haven and to create a sense of “welcome” for our Hispanic brothers and sisters;
- 3.C. Launch Mott Haven blog as a means of engaging social media to tell our story, post pictures and share in the life of Mott Haven.

Methodologies:

*Monitor webpage traffic through Google Analytics to determine the effect of this outreach effort;

*Measure Facebook traffic through likes and event RSVPs to determine the effect of this outreach effort;

*Measure You Tube promo views to measure the effect of this outreach effort;

*Measure number of blog followers to determine its effectiveness;

*Conduct follow up visitor surveys to measure satisfaction levels employing the Willingness, Understanding and Action Assessment Tool: **Willingness:** audience segment that expresses a willingness to receive program resources;

Understanding: subset of the “willingness” group that responds to follow-up; and

Action: subset of the “understanding” group that becomes an active part of programmatic activity, or additional action as a direct result of programmatic activity.

Intended Outcomes:

- Increased awareness of Mott Haven church and its activities through vehicle created for advertising church updates and special events.
- A cadre of non-congregational followers developed;

Evaluation:

A new webpage and establishment of Mott Haven blog as a means of engaging social media are under construction. Financial constraints have delayed the implementation of this strategy and methodologies until 2014. Our Facebook page has been updated to include announcements about coming events and programs; and there are regular posts to the site. A Twitter account was set up in late 2013 though there is a definite learning curve here in terms of using Twitter effectively. The promo for the church was filmed and launched on You Tube for

30 days in the Spring of 2013 with no appreciable traffic. After consultation with our technical advisor, the strategy for engaging Hispanic media was scrapped in favor of more relational activities.

Ministerial Competencies

Prophetic Agent

Ability to involve others in the process of seeking social change, to create group ownership, and to build coalitions; Skill in analyzing social structures and the ability to diagnose the roots of social problems; Sensitivity to and/or empathy with victims of social injustice.

Strategies:

Meet with Hispanic leaders, pastors, organizations:

Increase understanding of cultural differences within Hispanic community and understand key issues by visiting other congregations:

Engage in discussions with community partners regarding community issues through the leadership group meetings.

Evaluation:

My research and learning in this area has definitely improved my competency in this area. My gifting is in the area of administration and organizational analysis; so researching this project helped me to gain a greater understanding of the issues facing an urban church and changing demographics of a community. It also gave me greater empathy for the ways in which our Hispanic neighbors are victimized. I was able to meet with and talk with Hispanic pastors as well as pastors and leaders of multi-cultural congregations. Discussions with community partners was ongoing throughout the project.

Interpreter of Sacred Texts

Ability to interpret sacred scriptures in a meaningful and effective manner;

Ability to address contemporary concerns and needs effectively; Ability to empower one's listeners to grow spiritually.

Strategies:

Meet with Hispanic pastors, chaplains, congregations:

Take SSL classes in order to converse with Hispanic neighbors:

Partner with bilingual minister, intern or transplant for Bible storytelling:

Evaluation:

My research, exegesis, preparation and experience in teaching specialized subjects has improved my ability to interpret the sacred texts particularly in applying the learning to contemporary issues. I once had a professor who said, "A man can only think to the level to which he has been exposed." Certainly my exposure to Hispanic theologians has given me new tools with which to interpret the Scriptures from a different perspective. I was able to meet with and talk with Hispanic leaders and pastors as well as pastors and leaders of multi-cultural congregations but unable to partner with a bilingual minister or intern. I did not take SSL classes, but have been learning some conversational phrases in Spanish from our security guard.

Ecumenist

- Knowledge and appreciation of other denominational, confessional, cultural and/or religious traditions;
- Ability to provide structured opportunities for interdenominational, multicultural, and/or multi-faith worship, education and/or action;
- Willingness to foster dialogue and understanding across denominational, confessional, cultural or religious lines.

Strategies:

- Obtain technical assistance from other RCA congregations to enhance computer skills:
- Find bilingual partner to help with interpretation:
- Become familiar with and seek assistance from American Bible Society Multi-language Services in order to properly plan for bilingual worship services:
- Facilitate bilingual worship services:
- Engage in dialogue with Hispanic neighbors and other ethnic groups during Belhar Confession Bible study series:
- Visit Hispanic/ bilingual congregations to study different styles of worship:

Evaluation:

I was able to get the technical assistance I needed from an RCA congregation and we did have bilingual ministers to preach for us. We abandoned the idea of bilingual worship services. I was able to visit other congregations and gain good insight. The Multi-language Services department at ABS was unresponsive so I did not have the benefit of their expertise. I have been able to engage in dialogue with our Hispanic neighbors but outside of the Belhar Study.

CHAPTER 9: MODELS FOR INSPIRATION

Anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” The two case studies that follow are examples of the power of a faithful remnant and can provide hope and inspiration not only to Mott Haven, but to small churches struggling to survive. The first, New Community Corporation (NCC) is the story of a priest and a handful of people from the community of Newark, New Jersey who came together to save their neighborhood after the riots of 1967. The second is the Mid Bronx Desperadoes or MBD Housing Corporation as it is now called. While not a church or religious organization, none the less it too shows what a handful of people can do if they are serious about saving their community. During Jesus’ earthly ministry he saw to the people’s physical needs first, so that they might be able to receive the good news of God’s plan of salvation. These are two groups that I have studied for more than 16 years.

Following the case studies, I present the examples of a few churches that might be of interest and useful to Mott Haven in terms of their multi-cultural congregations and large numbers of Hispanics: Harvest Fields Community Church in the Bronx, New York; Highbridge Reformed Church also in the Bronx and Church on the Rock in New Haven, Connecticut. Also included is the Journey Church’s website for its simplicity.

New Community Corporation

A converted church, beautifully decorated with African American art serves as headquarters, four-star restaurant and conference center for the New Community Corporation in Newark, New Jersey. Founded nearly 47 years ago in response to the devastation and despair left in the wake of the 1967 riots, NCC is a minority based, nonprofit Community Development Corporation. A young priest along with six individuals from the community formed the core leadership group and took this as their creed: “out of the ashes a new community was created by a faith-filled people confirming their own dignity and determining their own destiny.⁴³” Father William Linder had recently been assigned to the Central Ward when the 1967 riots broke out. Pat and David Foley were suburbanites who volunteered their time in the Central Ward and were determined to help. The others, Mary Smith, Irvin Booker, Joe Chaneyfield and Willie Wright were residents of the community who were committed to the improvement of the neighborhood.

NCC was actually formed from a neighborhood group called the Queen of Angels. After the riots the group held informal discussions on what had happened to their neighborhood and the reasons why. According to Father Linder, “We were determined that if we were going to see any improvement, it had to come primarily from the people who lived here.” The incorporation was done almost immediately. The newly formed CDC established the need for building trust as their first priority. They undertook a “Walk for Understanding” through the Central Ward. After polling residents it became clear that the number one priority was affordable housing. They realized that funding was essential if they were to carry out their mission. With “Operation Understanding”, teams of two travelled to the suburbs to talk with residents there about race relations, the problems of the inner city and the efforts underway. This dialogue led to the

⁴³ Community Development Studio, *Building Community: The Work of the New Community Corporation Planning and Policy Community Development Studio Report*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2004)

creation of the NCC Foundation which became the fundraising arm of the group. Jaycees in 15 suburban communities sold shares in NCC for five dollars each, for a symbolic “foot of land.” They raised over \$100,000 which enabled NCC to purchase its first two acres targeted for redevelopment.

With a 20 year plan that included a model for 45 acres of housing, commercial and education facilities, NCC’s goal was to create a sufficiently large economic base so that the community would control the funds for future economic development. The CDC understood that it must not depend solely on the good will of the larger society to develop the jobs and resources needed by its poor, minority inner city residents. It must build and maintain an independent vitality. “Integration into complex economic institutions can only come when people have the strength that comes from the pride of self-reliance. This necessitates the development of prosperous local systems controlled from within.”⁴⁴

Now the path was not easy and change did not come overnight. There was opposition from all sides. In fact, it would take five years before NCC saw the fruition of its first endeavor – a housing development. Day long planning sessions held on Saturdays took two years and community residents were involved at every step in the process. As time went on they began to be more and more assertive about what they wanted for their community. “It was very exciting,” said Cecilia Faulk, “the people in the program were given the sense they could determine and have some control of their destiny. And that’s where it all started.”⁴⁵ Another strength of NCC is that the founding members each committed to 20 year terms which has provided continuity and stability for the organization.

Soon after the success of their housing development, the CDC’s focus shifted to the needs of its elderly residents. By 1978 NCC broke ground on their fourth housing project, a

⁴⁴ Robert Guskind, Neal Pierce, *Against the Tide*, (Newark: The Prudential Foundation, 1993)

⁴⁵ Ibid

\$20.7 million project: New Community Commons – 375 units, 222 of which were high rise units for seniors and 153 townhouses for low income families. The first Babyland Day Care Center was opened in 1969 in the basement of a housing project. Today Babyland is a separately incorporated entity of NCC with seven centers. St. Rose of Lima Grammar School is an alternative school serving 300 children. In 1999 NCC opened the New Horizons Charter School and in 2001 Lady Liberty Charter School. The CDC also opened the Community Hills Early Learning Center. Essex Valley Visiting Nurse Association and Care at Home joined NCC in 2000 and in 2002 established a School of Practical Nursing. In addition the RN Bridge Program opened in 2004⁴⁶. New Community has also established a credit union, restaurants and walk in health centers within the senior housing complexes. Children Together is a foster care group where neglected or abused siblings under age 12 receive foster care as a family group. The CDC can boast that over 6,000 people live in their affordable housing, and provides jobs to over 2,000 local residents. As previously noted, the original sanctuary now serves as a conference center and millinery training center (all linens are made in-house) and restaurant called the Priory. NCC also owns a strip mall with several franchise operations and a badly needed anchor store – Pathmark (1991).

Many of the projects the CDC has undertaken were not what the founders had in mind when NCC was created. Its holistic approach grew out of the process rather than being a part of the original design. Because the process is community driven, the CDC embraced a philosophy of responding to community needs independent of religion or creed. Understanding the times in which we live, NCC has begun its own outreach to the Hispanic community.

New Community Corporation is living proof of what can happen when a faithful remnant understands that by virtue of being a remnant, God has given us divine purpose. Because the

⁴⁶ Community Development Studio, *Building Community: The Work of the New Community Corporation Planning and Policy Community Development Studio Report*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2004)

church can never be “wholly isolated from the culture that surround it,⁴⁷” the church cannot be afraid to participate; holding in tension our praxis and our theology. We are called to be incarnational, to be the living presence of the resurrected Christ, coming alongside people on their journey. We are called to transform individuals *and* our communities. Transformation can and will occur when residents are empowered.

Comprehensive Community Revitalization Program and the Mid Bronx Desperadoes

The “Desperadoes”(MBD) were actually a gang of women in the South Bronx who were fed up with the muggings and arson going on in their neighborhood. Things were so bad, even the police and fire departments were afraid to respond to calls for assistance from the neighborhood. Determined to put an end to the destruction of their community they informally became a neighborhood watch group and began reporting crimes to the police. MBD began surveying the residents in the community about their needs and wants. Housing emerged as number one on the list with clean up and enhancement of the neighborhood second. The Desperadoes focused on organizing the residents. Central to their mission was the belief that communication and collaboration among residents, service providers and city/state agencies was imperative. Focus groups were created to address the issues. MBD moved quickly to establish a collaborative relationship with the police department. Their goal was to eliminate crime in key areas such as streets and parks. Attention was also given to improving police patrols and resident awareness. MBD also took a trip to Newark to visit NCC which was used as a model for their organization. MBD would later become the MBD Housing Corporation.

In 1991 the Bronx was burning. A fire near Yankee Stadium led to MBD becoming a part of the Comprehensive Community Revitalization Program (CCRP) which is a collaboration of five CDCs in the South Bronx – the MBD Community Housing Corporation, the Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council, the Mount Hope Housing Company, the Phipps Community

⁴⁷ Kevin H. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, Michael J. Sleasman, ed., *Everyday Theology How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 34.

Development Corporation and Promesa. The South Bronx had been identified as a test site for this kind of comprehensive approach to neighborhood revitalization. Under this arrangement, the CDCs served as organizers, facilitators and implementers of integrated strategies aimed at transforming the quality of life in neighborhoods. Each of the five CDCs formed neighborhood advisory councils with the task of developing five year strategic plans for each neighborhood. Consultants were hired to engage residents in developing their neighborhood. The programs complement each other as strategies for empowering individuals and neighborhoods to help them work together in building healthy, livable and enjoyable communities. In addition to reconnecting the CDCs with their constituencies. It provided the framework for, working toward similar goals many of which they would not have accomplished alone. Prior to joining CCRP they viewed each other primarily as competitors.

By 1995 CCRP had three primary health care practices located in CDC buildings, one of which MBD has. In addition, MBD received funding to connect children and their families to immunization and health care. MBD also partners with the Fresh Air Fund to provide free summer vacations, camping and educational opportunities for youth. A Community and Social Service department provides case management services, housing referrals, assistance with welfare, and health outreach to families in the community as with designated care coordinators for seniors.

Another CCRP/MBD accomplishment was a designation from the city to develop a \$21 million shopping center - the New Horizons Retail Center that employs more than 200 people full and part-time. Anchored by the Pathmark grocery store, other retail stores include: IHOP and Subway restaurants, Radio Shack, A.J. Wright and Game Stop. To date MBD Housing has built over 2300 housing units, with plans to build another 1500 units over the next three years. ⁴⁸

⁴⁸ www.mbdhousing.org, accessed 11/10/13.

MBD is yet another example of what a committed few can do when they take the future of their community into their own hands. It proves that community led organizations can take back their communities and can transform them. They can chart a new course and a new direction themselves. Where there had previously been resignation to despair there can be a future, bright with hope.

The following are examples of churches that have many of the qualities that Mott Haven desires in its vision for a multi-cultural, multigenerational church where families and youth can worship together, fellowship together and become the incarnate presence of Jesus Christ together.

Harvest Fields Community Church

Established in 2000, Harvest Fields Community Church is located on East Tremont Street in the Bronx. The exterior of the building does not suggest that it is a church and if one is not careful you might pass it by, just as I did. One of the first things you notice when you enter Harvest Fields is the energy. The lobby is bustling with lots of people, lots of young people. Everyone seems to be busy, rushing here and there. Lots of upcoming activities are posted around the outer sanctuary. It appears to be mainly a Hispanic and African American congregation with a small number of people from the Caribbean. The pastor is African American. 15 minutes before service starts the place is packed. It's standing room only. Everyone is casually dressed, including the ushers who are wearing special T shirts. They begin to escort people to the two overflow rooms. Overall people are friendly but the greeting seems disjointed as if they are doing it by rote not out of sincerity. The sanctuary located on the second floor, has a sort of warehouse feel with lots of exposed beams, pipes and brick which lends to the casual atmosphere. It is a large sanctuary, approximately 225 seats. There is a full complement of a media team located in a pen at the back of the room. A full band and a praise team made up of young girls begin the service. They all appear to be in their late teens and early twenties with the exception of the praise leader, a man who may be 35. The oldest person in the congregation there might be in their late 50s. The band plays a rock style version of "My God is Awesome"

and other neo-Christian music with a heavy emphasis on guitar and drums. Scriptures and a lot of colorful graphics appear on twin screens. There is obviously a state of the art sound system and sound baffles on the walls. Praise and worship continues for at least 45 minutes.

At the end of praise and worship the leader prays for the teens and kids. The congregation, which is made up of a lot of young families and young people, recites the church's mission statement while the ushers pass out offering envelopes and visitor packets. The children are dismissed to Sunday School. Then the praise and worship leader tells the congregation that the church is always trying to bring them the latest artists but their giving is necessary for it to continue. No other formal statement was made indicating that it was offering time, just a notice flashed on the screens. Ushers came down the aisles with small velvet bags to collect the offering. Announcements of events and activities scrolled on the screen, including the launch of an all-Spanish worship service. Just then a Korean young woman named Hyson Lee came to the stage along with two African American young men with their hats turned backward. After making a statement that she "breaks stereotypes" she launched into a vigorous rap song. She performed for about 20 minutes.

Afterward a young Hispanic man in jeans and a sports jacket mounted the stage and said, "In case you are wondering, this ain't your momma's church." He began to preach in a conversational style, referencing Paul's letter and warning to the church in 2 Corinthians. He talked of the punishment he would receive when he failed to heed his mother's warnings and did a masterful job of weaving his personal story with the biblical text. He was a very good storyteller. It was evident that the congregation was enjoying the sermon and were very involved with it. The story, mixed with a few Spanish references clearly resonated with them. The service lasted about two hours.

Likewise Harvest Fields' whole approach is informal and conversational in nature. Their mission statement: "revealing God, reaching people, restoring lives." As their name implies the church strives to be community focused. Their mission statement goes on to say, "We believe

that our ministry is the beginning of something new God desires to do in the Bronx. God has called us to function as a spiritual refuge for those who have been marginalized and hurt by life. Harvest is a place of new beginnings and second chances where we work together to heal and discover God's purpose for our lives. We are committed to take this ministry beyond these four walls so we can serve our communities. We strive to work along-side other churches to show the awesomeness of God to a watching world." Harvest Fields describes itself as "soul refreshing, multi-cultural, soul changing, community minded with dynamic praise and worship and spiritually balanced teaching." Their visitor packet is pretty standard with a generic welcome letter and their statement of faith. Most of the literature is in English although an announcement about the Christmas program was bilingual. There is no formal worship bulletin, just a printed schedule of activities with a featured activity and graphics on the front (movie night and Thanksgiving food drive), other announcements, and ministries available as well as a list of the ministerial staff. There are 12 on the pastoral staff and 16 ministry leaders.

Harvest Fields has an active website, Facebook page, email account and twitter account. They meet for Sunrise prayer at 7:30 a.m. on Sundays followed by two praise and worship services. Bible study takes the form of a Bible Institute on Monday evenings. The Men's Ministry meets on Tuesday evenings and Wednesdays has Morning Prayer at 10 a.m., Senior's Ministry at 11 a.m. and praise and prayer at 7:30 p.m., followed by the Pioneers Club. Youth meet on Wednesdays for Art, the first and third Thursdays for Young Adult LIVE, Youth Choir rehearsal at 6 p.m. Fridays followed by Youth Ministry at 7:30. Communion occurs on the last Wednesday of the month during the prayer service. There is no apparent denominational identity. My visit was quickly followed up with a simple letter from the pastor inviting me to return.

Church on the Rock – New Haven

Church on the Rock New Haven (COTR) was founded in 1991, Church on the Rock is a “full gospel, multi-cultural church under the covering of Church on the Rock International.⁴⁹” CRI is an association of independent churches and pastors with specific guidelines and policies that member churches must adhere to. Although it is not technically a denomination, the organization functions in much the same way. The difference may be that it is a for profit organization. The church is located in an industrial section of town, not far from Fair Haven - a largely Hispanic neighborhood.

The pastors at New Haven are Todd and Leslie Foster, a husband and wife team with life-long ties to the city. When you arrive at COTR you see lots of people greeting each other warmly. I was greeted by members as I walked along the hallway. Upon entering the sanctuary I was again greeted not as a visitor, but more as if I was a member. (I later learned that they had recognized me from my time as an elected official and felt they knew me.) I am handed a bulletin – a simple four page bulletin that is printed in black and white. Although there are no pictures and no color, the print is large and in various fonts. It is quite attractive. There is a welcome, information on prayer times, a section on becoming a member and a large print calendar of the coming week’s activities on the opposite page. The back page has a calendar of future events. Inside there is an offering envelope, a post card about an upcoming women’s retreat and a pledge card for their Legacy Fund. Legacy is the church’s effort to raise funds for the youth ministry.

There is an informal feel here at COTR, people slowly wander into the sanctuary well after the start of worship. The youth minister opens with a sermonette before praise and worship begins. It is a mixed congregation with African Americans, Caucasians, Africans and Hispanics. African Americans seem to be the majority although Hispanics are a close second. There is one Hispanic associate minister. The pastor and his wife are Cape Verdean. There are a lot of couples, families and single women with children.

⁴⁹ www.rocknewhaven.org, accessed 1/14/14.

The sanctuary is very large with approximately 500 seats but was only half full. There are dual AV screens and state of the art sound system. The pulpit is more of a stage with no formal pulpit or lectern. Praise and worship goes on for about an hour with a lot of neo-Christian songs. There is room for a full band although I only saw a keyboard player and drummer. While praise and worship is going on, people are free to come to the altar and pray. You see people raising their hands and quietly giving God reverence; there was very little demonstrative behavior. The pastor slips quietly into the worship and does not approach the pulpit till after the praise and worship is ending. He joins in the song and afterwards greets the congregation. The children are dismissed to Sunday School and immediately the pastor announces communion. The servers are dressed in black and red but without uniform. There are some young men with special red blazers and they participate in serving communion. The pastor recites the appropriate scripture as reference but mainly uses inspirational talk and not the words of institution. The offering is taken up right after communion. The pastor then gives his sermon title which happened to be different than what he had given the person who was responsible for recording the sermons for sale. He noted that the church had been dissatisfied with the live streaming that had gone on before and so the church had stopped it. But the church had since worked out all of the kinks and so live streaming was occurring again. The message was about pressing toward the mark and not becoming complacent thinking that to be a Christian one should be content and not strive to do anything because one's lot in life must be God's will. He then played an inspirational sports video titled, "How Bad Do You Want It" to conclude his sermon. The video went over really well with the congregation. After the sermon Pastor Foster opened it up for prayer and his wife came forward to pray for visitors and announce that there was a special gift for them at the rear of the sanctuary. I was struck by the informality and the ease with which the pastors interacted with the congregation. The service lasted about 2 hours and 15 minutes.

Church on the Rock has an active website with links to Samaritan's Purse and Heifer International as well as Max Lucado Ministries, and Upper Room Ministries. The church also

has an association with Bishop Darlington of World Outreach Ministries International, a 21 year old association of 200 churches in 20 different nations (mostly Third World). The association boasts well over 30,000 members. Headquartered in Maryland, there are member churches in Georgia, Minnesota, Texas, Virginia, North Carolina and New York in the United States.

COTR has an on-line Bible study for adults, teens and little kids and 21 different language Bibles though interestingly Spanish is not one of them. There are memory verses and daily audio devotionals and an email newsletter. They call their mission a “Mission of Transformation: In Christ, we are committed to the divine transformation of our individual lives, our families, our local church and the Greater New Haven region. We nonetheless recognize our godly responsibility to the global Church of Christ and the world for which He died. More specifically, in an environment of true community and genuine love, Church on the Rock endeavors to develop and empower individuals to walk in their divine potential and maximize their contribution to the world. We call it ‘making the God difference.’ COTR also uses a mnemonic to help members remember the Mission: J.U.S.T. Lo. Co.- We are all about Jesus. We are United in Service to Him in the business of Transformation. We do so in an environment of Loving Community.” The church works with a local homeless shelter and has men from the shelter staying at the church a couple times per year. There is also a back to school program targeted for the children living in one of the nearby housing projects.

There is no specific outreach to the Hispanic community however, according to one of the church leaders there are a lot of Hispanics who have migrated to COTR from other churches. He attributes the church’s multi-cultural congregation as the reason. However, recognizing the changing times we live in, there is an aggressive push to go after young people. On any given Wednesday the church has at least 100 youth in attendance. The goal is to position the church for growth over the next 15 years. A major fundraising campaign is underway to ensure that the youth ministry will not only grow but flourish and have the resources it needs.

Membership at COTR is likened to a ship with four levels of membership: Crew which is the basic membership and is inclusive of attendance at worship service and prayer, financial giving, and ministry service. It is the prerequisite to working in any other ministry. Those at the Stewardship level are those who are willing to go beyond the tithe level of giving and have completed Ministry Training; Dove (evangelist) level members lead para church and evangelistic outreach away from the church; and Ship's Officers of course are the church leaders who are appointed by the pastors.

Highbridge Community Church

Highbridge Community Church, located in the Highbridge section of the Bronx, is a unique RCA church, with an ethnic congregation made up of Africans, African Americans and Hispanics. The church building itself is one of the oldest buildings in that community. In fact the community grew up and around the church and the school across the street. It was called the Union of Highbridge Reformed Church although no one seems to remember why. Highbridge Union was actually closed at one point and Highbridge Community is actually a church plant founded in 2006 from Fordham Manor Reformed Church, which was led by Pastor Irving Rivera. Pastor Cora Taitt, who is African American, was an elder with Pastor Rivera when they decided to establish this church plant. Highbridge is a mirror church to Mott Haven. Looking to Highbridge you can see the journey ahead of Mott Haven. Pastor Taitt describes the church when she arrived as having lost their connection with the community. Membership was in a steady decline and only a faithful remnant held on. The church had once been a thriving church with families and children and an active youth ministry. By the time Pasto Taitt arrived, the youth ministry was in tatters and there were very few children left.

Sunday morning worship is a blend of traditional and contemporary, with almost a Baptist feel. The church leadership is equally represented by each ethnic group in the congregation which is very important for the church because it communicates that they are a multi-cultural congregation. According to Pastor Taitt, although they were a plant

from Fordham Manor the congregation resists any other kind of description. African Americans are the majority followed by Hispanics but only a few long term members would refer to the congregation as African American. How the congregation sees itself has a lot to do with the leadership says Pastor Taitt. “I remind myself that this is a multi-cultural congregation and sometimes when I would like to do a certain thing that could be considered strictly an “African American” thing, I don’t do it because I realize it would not be healthy for the congregation. We try to honor all of the ethnicities here.”

The youth ministry is growing, having been built up over a number of years. When they came, Pastor Taitt brought a family with four children and with the children that remained, they rebuilt the ministry slowly by introducing one thing at a time. In fact that is the way they rebuilt the congregation. First they understood what had happened; then they focused on one thing: Fellowship – inside and out. They began walking through the neighborhood, relying on members who were from the community to make introductions and then slowly gaining their trust while inviting everyone to the church. There was already a second Saturday worship service in place so Pastor Taitt expanded it to include a meal. They went back out into the community and began to invite people to share a meal. Some Saturdays they get a crowd, especially from the nearby shelters. Sometimes there are only church members present. But says the pastor, they have come to know that we are consistent and we will be here.

Over time the church decided to host a food pantry. It was not a ministry of Highbridge, the church just leased the space but people began to know about the church through the pantry. “In the end, it was about consistently loving them, working on ourselves through training and study so that we could grow as we were attempting to

grow the people,” says Pastor Taitt. She cautions that changing behaviors and rebuilding takes time and you must be willing to be in it for the long haul.

Today, there is a busyness to this congregation that is felt when you enter the sanctuary. Now you will see families and couples and a number of children. In the afternoon an Ghanaian congregation uses the facility for their own worship service. They have a website that is straight forward with a picture gallery that scrolls across the top. You immediately get a sense of who Highbridge is. Ministries and events are detailed as well as the church’s history and what they believe. Sermons are available weekly via audio file.

Their mission is simple, “Facilitate growth through practical teaching of the Word; equip God’s people for ministry; and preach the Word.” Although they are small, they have a clear missional identity. On a local level they have the Hunger for Healing 12 step ministry which tackles substance abuse as well as emotional and social issues such as divorce, physical abuse and eating disorders. Internationally, they have a deacon serving in a village in Nigeria which the church supports. Highbridge’s vision for the community is simple as well: carry out the Great Commission; advocate for social change; partner with other churches and organizations; steward the resources God has entrusted to them; and serve with diligence, pride and excellence.

Journey Church Website⁵⁰

The Journey Church located in New York City has two campuses – one in Queens and the other in Manhattan. They are a part of a larger network of Journey Churches around the country. Their website is particularly inviting. Their tag? “A casual, contemporary Christian church.” Their statement of beliefs is presented both in summary and full length. They are

⁵⁰ Journey Church New York City, www.journeynyc.com, accessed 11/23/13.

community service oriented and signing up is relatively easy through the website. It is filled with lots of color and eye catching advertisements about ministry events and even a giving program. What I like most about this website is its language – very simple and straight forward. If you click on the tab “Sunday” it will even tell you what to expect, from what to wear, what you’ll see, down to how long the service will last. They have gone out of their way to make you feel at ease before you even get there.

A full service children’s ministry called Journey Kidz can handle your children from birth to the fifth grade. Parents are reassured that all volunteers in the children’s ministry have undergone a background check. The church is family-friendly and provides resources so that parents can work with their child during the week and be in tune with what they are learning in Journey Kidz. For the Christmas holiday, a special video was recorded so that everyone could watch it at home. Services for the last Sunday of the year were cancelled. Volunteering or getting more information on just about anything they do is only a click away. What makes this website so appealing is the many and varied options it provides and plain language it uses. Taken together, the website communicates the identity of Journey Church really well.

CHAPTER 10: TOWARD A FUTURE

The Mott Haven Reformed Church is a small urban African American congregation with aged members, declining attendance and declining revenues. They are not alone and their circumstances are not unusual. All over America mainline churches are facing the same kinds of dilemmas: loss of revenue, declining membership, societal and demographic change..

Barbara Wheeler in 1990 decried the decline of mainline protestant churches, noting that their survival matters deeply because “without institutions to hold them, the ideas and values that mainline traditions have held to be important will have no place in the broader cultural conversation. Further, membership decline has been accompanied by an apparent loss of religious vitality and moral direction.” She discusses three theories as to the reason for the decline. Old wine skins- meaning that the congregation is reactive, old and sluggish with no internal sort of dynamism; while the voluntary theory suggests that tradition, rituals and sticking together over time have less meaning and so the people must choose to create something new; as opposed to the narrative theory wherein the congregation emphasizes its own narrative, all of its rituals and particular language and meaning that draws like-minded people together. Wheeler asks, “So what, given these different readings of decline, can be done? What courses of action are open to congregations, their leaders and the outside agencies that support them?” She concedes that each theory while valid, none can be said to be the particular cause of the current state of decline. She acknowledges that no one knows with any degree of certainty how to respond to the current situation. However, Wheeler does say that congregations have but one choice which is to adapt; and acknowledges that mainline congregations have been doing just

that, both intuitively and by conscious strategy. She concludes by looking to a lack of research on the part of seminaries and institutions as the reason for a lack of clarity.⁵¹”

To be sure Mott Haven evidences at least two of these theories. It has most definitely drawn likeminded people together and draws upon its rich history for meaning. To some extent the congregation has been a closed circle, not easily welcoming others not like them. Until the new pastor came, the congregation was sluggish and reactive. At the same time, any church is a reflection of the state of the larger society. Given the status of the community that surrounds the church, one can understand how they might have lost hope of a better future.

Still others point to the shift in demographics. In an article written for the *National Journal*, Alessandra Ram says, “the black church is in crisis, with scholars claiming that it has lost its prophetic and progressive influence. But the black church has also been confronted with a more visceral change: the shifting demographics around the urban black space caused in part by people like me.” By “me” she is referring to the generation of young educated millennials.⁵² Although she is looking at a neighborhood in Washington, D.C., what she is really talking about is gentrification, another national phenomenon. Gentrification is happening in Mott Haven. However, in our community survey, it ranked well below other issues such as homelessness, crime and substance abuse. As to whether the church has lost its prophetic voice and influence is debatable. As believers, we hold on to Christ’s assurance that the very gates of hell will not prevail against the church. Mott Haven’s 162 year history says something about God’s intention for this church. God has not allowed it to survive for this long without purpose. Moreover, throughout history there have been times when the church’s voice has been muted, likewise there are those times when the church has risen to the challenge to speak truth to power and to find its

⁵¹ Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, Louis B. Weeks, ed., “Uncharted Territory: Congregational Identity and Mainline Protestantism”, in *The Presbyterian Predicament Six Perspectives*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990) 68.

⁵² Alessandra Ram, in “Changing Neighborhoods, Black Churches Face an Identity Crisis” in *National Journal*, www.nationaljournal.com, accessed 10/13/12.

prophetic footing. It is not surprising that the church is trying to redefine itself in the face of such tremendous societal change.

Anthony Pinn discusses the period 1960-1990 as both a time of decline and growth for the Black church. The economic, political and social gains made in the sixties bore fruit in the '70s and '80s. A prosperous Black middle class came to see the church as irrelevant to their lives. Moreover, because the leadership in the black community had been vested in the clergy for so long, the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King created a crisis in leadership that would last through the '80s. Children born during this period were less likely to be involved in the church. Moreover, the church's, "generally lax attitude concerning socioeconomic and political developments after its civil rights activities did not help young people wrestling with crack cocaine and the problems generated during the 1980s." However, when it became apparent that the material success of the Black middle class did not open the doors they thought it would, they began to return to the church. Thus the '90s can also be considered a period of growth. "By 1997 the Black Church claimed over 2.5 million members in more than 63,000 congregations.⁵³" This resurgence benefitted Mott Haven for a brief period. However, Mott Haven's own crisis in leadership and lack of a permanent pastor would leave only a faithful remnant, holding on to the memories of their legacy of community involvement and service.

David Rozen, in summarizing the results of the Faith Community Today (FACT) series of national surveys of American congregations (2000-2010) reports that, "Despite bursts of innovation and pockets of vitality, the first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed a slow, overall erosion of the strength of America's congregations... the decade also saw: a steep drop in financial health; continuing high levels of conflict; and aging memberships." He acknowledges however that "the decade brought: a continued increase in innovative, adaptive worship; a surprisingly rapid adoption of electronic technologies; a dramatic increase in racial/ethnic

⁵³ Anthony B. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 34.

congregations, many for immigrant groups; a general increase in the breadth of both member-oriented and mission-oriented programs. It also gave witness to: an increase in connection across faith traditions; and a twist in the historical pattern of religious involvement in support of the electoral process. The net, overall result: Fewer persons in the pews and decreasing spiritual vitality.”⁵⁴

Two separate FACT surveys Holy Toll and Facts on Worship detail the effects of the recession on congregations as well as trends in worship over the past decade. In Holy Toll, Rozen shows that the recession affected nearly every congregation regardless of size or denomination; whether they were financially healthy or already struggling. The depth of the effect of course was directly relatable to the severity of the recession on the income of congregants. Over half (57%) report their income declined a little or a lot due to the recession. Those congregations where income declined show dramatically less worship attendance growth, as well as diminished spiritual vitality and a smaller volunteer base.⁵⁵ The survey did find that American congregations worship in an amazing number of languages according to Marjorie H. Royle, in Facts on Worship. “About 10% of congregations use a language other than English at least occasionally in their worship... Half are languages used to reach out to new immigrants. Spanish is the most common second language with 5% of congregations saying that they use it in worship. Churches that are willing to be innovative in their worship have greater vitality and growth. Churches that have historically been Black seem to lead in this area. However, “... a quality worship experience is important for congregations that want to grow...congregations that

⁵⁴ David Rozen, *A Decade of Change in American Congregations*, (Hartford: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011)

⁵⁵ David Rozen, *Holy Toll the Impact of the 2008 Recession on American Congregations*, (Hartford: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011)

provide a solid worship experience, including worship that is joyful, inspiring, and full of a sense of God's presence, are more likely to be spiritually vital and growing in numbers.⁵⁶

Diana Butler Bass offers a new perspective on the decline of mainline Protestant churches. She suggests there is evidence that “what is happening in American religious life today is a natural and normal response to rapid social change.” The social changes of the 1970s and 1980s, “unhinged traditional American religious patterns and called for greater clarity about the Christian message and greater authenticity in Christian congregations.” Some churches were able to ride the wave of change and many were not. One of the most significant changes had to do with church attendance. During the 1950s and 1960s, Sunday used to be the day that everyone went to church and no one worked. Blue laws prevented you from shopping or purchasing liquor on Sunday. But for younger Americans, those born late in the Boomer phase and for those born into Generation X, the church became irrelevant. “Disestablishment and de-traditionalization are the two most dramatic cultural shifts of the late twentieth century, and they are nobody's fault” says Bass. “They are manifestations of global philosophies, international capitalism, technological revolutions and reorganized political and social community.” They are part and parcel of the world in which we live. We cannot undo history, we cannot call back the changes in society and culture.

She posits that a new kind of church is being born out of the chaos of change, that of the *practicing congregation*, the ones who are experiencing renewed vitality through “innovative engagement with traditional Christian practices.” According to Bass, mainline churches are changing and have already changed. She sees this as a new trend, “whereby religious communities focus on meaning-making by gathering up the past and re-presenting it through both story and action in ways that help people connect with God, one another and the world outside the

⁵⁶ Marjorie H. Royle, *Facts on Worship: 2010*, (Hartford: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2012)

doors of the church buildings.⁵⁷” She also points to a finding in the Faith Communities Today (FACT) studies in that a church that places emphasis on personal and at home religious practices experience greater vitality. This is another contributing factor to the new style of mainline congregations. A practicing congregation then, is one that holds on to its traditions and its history but is not afraid to examine “the way we do church” and recast itself in ways that give new meaning to their present circumstance. Instead of reacting to societal change, a practicing congregation will engage the change, investigate it and dare to find God’s hand in it. Intentional and participatory are the by words by which a practicing congregation will be known.

Peter Morgan suggests that it is the era of the mainline denomination that is in decline and likens it to the pattern of life and death. This radical change should be seen as a natural part of Christianity’s evolution and we do not yet know what we will be. This is not a cause for despair but hope. “We may experience the death of denominations. But the pattern of changing eras helps us believe that our pain is the pain of travail. We are mothers giving life to a new church for a new time.”⁵⁸

Because the church is part of the community, it must be able to read the cultural trends, identify the issues that affect the community and join with it to address them. In other words, the church has got to get back in the game, and put boots on the ground. Whenever a military decision needs to be made as to whether to send troops into a conflict, leaders put their heads together, assess the situation, decide what weapons will be needed, count up the cost in terms of likely casualties and lay out a short term and a long term plan. When the troops go in, often they go in with the understanding that they must do whatever it will take to restore order. They will have to fight of course, but they may also have to build, may have to be peace keepers and build

⁵⁷ Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation Imagining a New Old Church*, (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2004) 4.

⁵⁸ Peter M. Morgan, *Story Weaving Using Stories to Transform Your Congregation*, (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1986) 31.

trust and rapport with the native citizenry. The church can do no less. At its core, a practicing congregation is one that has not lost sight of the biblical mandate to “love our neighbor as our self.” When we truly love, we will spare nothing for the sake of that love. If we must go to the ends of the earth to make sure of that love’s wellbeing, we will do it. We must do the same for the beloved community. “I am what I am because of what we all are,” is the principal of Ubuntu. “Ubuntu provides the bridge to walk across the chasm between rugged individualism and the creation of the beloved community...Thus a concern and regard for the welfare of our neighbor must become rooted in our values, our daily interactions and our actions.”⁵⁹

These are perilous times for churches like Mott Haven who are trying to survive in a community that has been written off long ago. Numerous scholars paint a bleak picture of the future. Having come close to closure, even the congregants, according to the church profile, are not too sure whether the church can continue. Attendance is down and so are finances. There are clearly not enough people to carry out all of the tasks of ministry. The odds are against them and things don’t look particularly good, except that ...”faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen”... “for we walk by faith and not by sight.” To be sure the church would have ceased to exist eons ago had believers only relied on what they could see. For most of its history Mott Haven has been a social church with a commitment to social programming and community service. The church was, a home for the members and a source of stability for its families. Mott Haven has survived for 162 years. There is a lesson in that alone. If we look a little closer we will see that God is already at work. God has given them a dynamic pastor who cares deeply about the congregation and the community. God has given this pastor a wealth of ideas and initiatives that she wants to pursue on behalf of Mott Haven.

Bass asks the question, “What if the story wasn’t about decline, division and spiritual dismay? What if the story was about imaginative congregations reaching back to their native

⁵⁹ Adam Taylor, *Mobilizing Hope Faith Inspired Activism for a Post Civil Rights Generation*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2010) 142.

stories, drawing out practices known to their ancestors and finding new ways of being faithful in a fragmented, de-traditionalized world?” What if Mott Haven survives? How will it survive and what will be its latest incarnation? I believe Mott Haven can and will survive but to do so it will need to move beyond being a social congregation to becoming an intentional congregation, a participatory and practicing congregation. Mott Haven has a lot of “pre-work” to do in order to become a healthy and vibrant place that people want to be a part of. As we pray for God to send the laborers, the church must remain committed to its mission to be the living presence of Jesus Christ to the Mott Haven community. “Healthy churches are also incarnational. They are well informed and involved in the world. This means knowing what is going on, spending time with people unlike ourselves, finding ways to serve other, risking accusations and misunderstanding in order to be with those who are sinners.”

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

Collaboration and Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is one of the best things that Mott Haven can do. Because it calls for assessing what your strengths are and assessing what is going on in the community that surrounds the church. Mott Haven has taken some first steps in this direction. The work of the leadership committee and the strategic goals it has outlined will be the cornerstone for sustainability for the church. However, the church will need to put those strategic goals into a realistic timeframe and prepare itself for the long haul. Change will come to Mott Haven but not quickly. There is a lot of preparatory work that needs to be done. A number of the strategies envisioned for this project were premature for the church, but can and should still be undertaken. The work that the committee has been doing must be seen as planting seeds for a future harvest.

One of the first things the church should do is to endeavor to launch its advisory committee. Its first goal should be to repeat the community survey to ensure that it has tapped into the mindset of the community and confirm what the most important issues are. This will give the advisory committee some direction and focus for its advocacy. Additionally, it will allow the church to plan properly around its activities for the year by bringing in voices from the community. With the establishment of the advisory committee, the food pantry can be re-started. Training for the committee and church leaders should begin almost immediately, not just in terms of pantry operations but also in civic engagement. An empowered group of people can change the direction and future of their community. For the church this will enhance its image and reputation in the community. The people need to know that Mott Haven is still oriented toward serving the community. For the people it will bring a renewed sense of hope.

Collaboration is another essential component in the overall strategic plan. Helping the stakeholders in the community understand what it means to work together and how to work through disagreements will go a long way toward ensuring the group's effectiveness. Too often well-meaning folk want to serve on community boards and organizations but lack the skills to negotiate or compromise. At difficult moments the organization falls apart. "Citizens who become involved in civic affairs generally find themselves working against one another rather than with each other."⁶⁰ With proper training the advisory committee will learn how to get past the rough patches and learn to negotiate solutions that benefit everyone. Using the positive conflict model of managing disagreements constructively, "people working together can open-mindedly explore and combine ideas to create solutions."⁶¹ The Search Conference is a great tool for community groups to use that can help it build a base for collaboration. The Conference takes participants through three phases: Environmental Appreciation, which examines changes in the world around us and desirable and probable outcomes; Systems Analysis where we look at the history of the system or in this case the church, analyze its present situation and desired future; and Integration where the possible constraints are acknowledged and then strategies and action plans are developed.⁶²

Stakeholders (those that have a vested interest in the community) bring their separate interests into a new structure and then commit to a common mission. They learn to do this because of their own enlightened self-interest. Collaboration makes use of the diversity of our communities and taps into the gifts that each brings to the table. This is particularly important

⁶⁰ Program for Community Problem Solving, *Pulling Together: A Planning and Development Consensus Building Manual*, (Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute) 6.

⁶¹ Dean Tjosvold, *The Conflict Positive Organization Stimulate Diversity and Create Unity*, (Boston: Addison-Welsey, 1990) 105.

⁶² Merrelyn Emery, Ronald E. Purser, *The Search Conference A Powerful Method for Planning Organizational Change and Community Action*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. Publishers, 1996) 40.

given Mott Haven's small numbers. The church must build from the outside in so that it can begin to flourish again.

Partnerships also increase organizational capacity by allowing the church to accomplish what it could not do alone. Individual groups and organizations are most effective when they join together in a federation of organizations. The church has made a number of partnerships which is good. But it must be strategic about the kinds of partnerships it makes. In other words, partnerships only make sense if they bring a tangible benefit to Mott Haven. Like it or not, economics plays a major part in the success of any church. For a church like Mott Haven that is struggling financially, it will want to ensure that programming and partnerships have a "high ministry return for every donated dollar," according to Leith Anderson. Translation: giving is directly connected to tangible results. When congregants and visitors can "see" what they are contributing to, giving increases and congregational vitality goes up. In other words Anderson says, that people in the 21st century will commit more to a cause than "institutional perpetuation and operating budgets."⁶³

Establishing a CDC will allow Mott Haven to be more cause driven. "As Christians with a heart for our low-income communities, we bring a special set of values to the economic arena, values that include the common good, not just individual interest over the interests of the community."⁶⁴ It will open up an avenue of funding to support communal as well as missional activity and allow the church to carry out many of its strategic goals while lessening dependence on the operating budget. Where donors or politicians are unable to give to religious programs, they can give to programs under a community development corporation. The CDC can be the

⁶³ Leith Anderson, *A Church for the 21st Century Bringing Change to Your Church to Meet the Challenges of a Changing Society*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1992) 28.

⁶⁴ John M. Perkins, ed., *Restoring At-Risk Communities Doing it Together & Doing it Right*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995) 143.

platform on which to build a wide coalition of partners and forge a strong power base to affect change within the community.

Advocacy and Shared Vision

Mott Haven has committed itself to feeding the poor with natural and spiritual food; providing a safe haven for youth; advocating for those who have no voice; being a healing community; creating centers of learning and bringing the Shalom of God to the people. The church's ability to address the more pressing issues of the community will strengthen its advocacy. "The Reformation calls us to commitment to and action within the everyday world. Just as the reformers rejected retreat to the monasteries, so their modern heirs must reject a retreat into the narrow confines of Christian subculture."⁶⁵

The church must be the moral agent in the community and is called to proclaim and fight for justice in the world. Mott Haven can regain its prophetic stance but in order to do so, it must be willing to engage in radical criticism of the status quo, identify and name systems of inequities, oppression and exploitation. Nor can the church shy away from being political and using righteous indignation to call out those who would engage in economic exploitation. The church's prophetic role is to remind the people of the reality that God intends as opposed to current reality and engage the people so as to move them in response to God's command. As an institutional member of the community, the church has a responsibility to help the people of Mott Haven become more self-reliant, more successful, and more productive. In so doing the church will help create a stable community of stakeholders.

Feeding the Physical Needs of the Community

⁶⁵ Harvie M. Conn, Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry the Kingdom, the City & the People of God*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 268.

Re-starting the food pantry is one of the best ways that the church can foster a stronger and more direct relationship with the Hispanic community in Mott Haven. Service to our fellow man means that the church is willing to reach out to those in need and to those in distress because our ministry of service is the embodiment of the church. Homelessness, unemployment and hunger are serious issues for the Mott Haven community. A food pantry is the thing that Mott Haven can focus on as the way the church is identified in the community.

Like the example of Highbridge, Mott Haven should focus on one thing at a time. The pastor and congregation are in agreement that they want to see the church do more in terms of service. One of the foundational scriptures for Mott Haven is Jeremiah 29:7, understanding that the welfare of the city is tied to the welfare of the church. Here is where they can start. Hunger is a cause that people can give to and be committed to doing something about. The recent assault on the Food Stamp Program by Congress has made hunger an even more critical issue for our poor. The food pantry was the one activity that the entire congregation seemed to get behind. Many of them regularly brought donations without being asked. Not surprisingly, there is something about the psychology of food that resonates with this congregation. Having the pantry run by community residents will make it that much better and will likely grow the number of patrons.

My experience in running a food pantry at a church in Queens showed me that a well-run pantry is a prime field for discipleship and evangelism as well. Distributions were done according to family size and when a large family came to the pantry with say more than seven in the family, special provisions were made. No outdated or damaged goods were given out. Holidays were always made special by the addition of extra goodies, along with the Word of God via a tract or inspirational booklet. The pantry was run in an orderly and fair system of first come first served, although we developed a reputation for not letting anyone leave without something. Another important change we made is that we stopped volunteers at the pantry from being the first partakers and taking all the good stuff for themselves. Many of the patrons were elderly and

would line up as early as 4 a.m. (the pantry opened at 9 a.m.). We would invite them in and ask them to help us set up. We would serve them coffee and tea and cookies, play inspirational music and pray with the entire group of patrons before we began. These things did not go unnoticed. *They were watching and listening to us.* They soon came to regard the church as a safe haven where they would be treated with respect and dignity.

This philosophy of boots on the ground ministry, of relational discipleship soon spread to the soup kitchen as well. Both teams underwent Servant Leadership training as well as food handlers training and nutrition training. In the soup kitchen we went to home style cooking and special holiday meals and special gift bags for them at Christmas. We filled the bags with needed items like soap and shampoo, lotion and underwear along with chocolates, a small gift and the Word of God. Love and compassion and friendliness were the order of the day. As a result, some of our patrons began to come to worship services; some joined the church and became incredibly strong members; and the church gained a reputation for caring for people. The food program went from being one of the worst in the city to one of the best.

This same sort of relational, boots on the ground ministry can happen for Mott Haven too. “Christ reaches to the world through the two hands of the church. One hand is the church’s witness: evangelism. The other hand is the church’s service: prophetic works and deeds of compassion.”⁶⁶ Being the church means we are a community of believers who love and support each other as well as the stranger. Believers have an obligation to service and when serving, to be as forgiving as Christ, as loving as Christ and as concerned as Christ. Everyone has got to be willing to roll up their sleeves and get dirty and do it with a smile on their face and gratitude in their heart, knowing that “but for the grace of God, go I.”

⁶⁶ Peter M. Morgan, *Story Weaving Using Stories to Transform Your Congregation*, (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1986) 117.

James said “Faith without works is dead.”⁶⁷ It is through our acts of service that we often times can reach people with the gospel message. For its not what you say but what you do that people most often remember. You have to be willing to see beyond the obvious to get to the need. Sometimes you have to get to know someone and develop a bond of trust before they will let you help them. Too often these people have been disappointed and mistreated by people who claim to want to help them. One thing about ministering to people who are in challenging situations is that they can smell disingenuousness a mile away. Every action and interaction is an opportunity to witness, to demonstrate by our care for our brothers and sisters, and the love of Christ. “Such is the challenge of a ministry of love in messy times. So many people have been through terrible experiences which have left them feeling dirty, have robbed them of their self esteem. When the minister comes along, it seems to be impossible to “make love” to such people until they are brought to the point where they feel worthy of love’s attention.”⁶⁸

Like most churches, budgets are constrained and the need far outweighs the funds. Yet the church must be fully committed to the idea that in order to affect lasting and meaningful change in a person’s life, transformation must occur and that transformation can only be achieved through a holistic balance, through advocacy and a shared vision.

Social Media

The CEO of Yahoo Marissa Mayer was recently quoted as saying during her keynote address at the 2014 Consumer Electronics Show, “We are in the midst of a massive shift to mobile.”⁶⁹ The church of the twenty second century will be mobile. The church has got to move from stationary ministry to mobile ministry and mobile pastoring. Changing the paradigm so that Sunday morning is no longer the premier event of the week or the primary way to collect

⁶⁷ Jas 2:20

⁶⁸ Jerry Welte, *Ministry in a Messy World a New Model for Effective Ministry*, (San Jose: Resources Publications, Inc.) 203

⁶⁹ Jon Swartz, “CES 2014: Yahoo’s Mayer Puts on a Show” in *USA Today*, accessed 1/7/14.

donations and creating multiple options and ways for people to interact with and give to the church. More and more young people will want to access a connection to their church and/or any sort of religious affiliation through a podcast, which is an audio file that can be downloaded to a mobile device. Thus mastering Twitter, the webpage and Youtube is critical. We can also use social media to connect with the community and assess what is important to them using the survey feature on the website and posing questions via Twitter, an important tool for verifying what we think we know about issues that are important to the community. Paying attention to the habits of young people on the internet should also be a part of any social media strategy. A strategy to provide a religious connection in ways that allow for instant connection and access should be considered.

Using the webpage for Bible study and attached email as a means of communicating with as well as pastoring the folks who are not in the pews on Sunday and may never be, will be essential to being a relevant church. Live streaming and archiving, video and/or audio blogs and online Bible study will make the church available 24 hours a day. “The Bible is like the digital space of the spiritual world. We can hear from God anytime, anywhere and can access his presence through Scripture and prayer.”⁷⁰ As believers, we need to take seriously God’s command to be “fruitful and have dominion over the earth. That means the internet too. We can no longer think of being distant from this shift that the world is making. We need to be masters of the digital world and declare God’s presence in it. “Following Jesus Christ is about connection with God and with one another. The new house church – meeting on blogs, forums and feeds across virtual space – connects the faithful to one another. And when we meet in the name of Christ, we discover that Christ is there as well.”⁷¹ Even on the internet, the church needs to be able

⁷⁰ Allen Reesor, “Reframe the Conversation,” in *Uncover Magazine*, Summer 2012, 23.

⁷¹ Adam Thomas, *Digital Disciple Real Christianity in a Virtual World*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011) 34.

to energize people with the possibilities of God's promises and help them to see the newness of God's reality which is very different from what we know to be today's reality.

Bible Engagement

Throughout this project the congregation was engaged with the Bible, albeit not necessarily through the strategies I planned. Mott Haven is very engaged with the Bible. It undergirds every program, every service and every training that undertaken. At the same time, and most importantly, we see the church actively engaged with the Bible in its relational activities. For what is Bible engagement if it is not being "living epistles to be read of all men"? Every time we interact with our neighbors in providing service and embracing them with hospitality and love we are living Bible engagement.

An important finding is that there seems to be a disconnect between the pastor's perceptions of their understanding and the congregation's view of their habits using and understanding of the Bible. Perhaps then, what is needed is a more creative way to be biblically engaged rather than just hearing it preached or read. Biblical storytelling is one way. The Cotton Patch Gospel series done by Clarence Jordan which contemporizes certain portions of Scripture (Matthew, John, Luke, Acts and Paul's Epistles) and sets them in the context of the twentieth century South; is another tool that might help the congregation to internalize the lessons of scripture and help them to develop a better understanding of the Bible. Using video clips may be another and drama is yet another. There are a number of websites like Godtube where inspirational clips can be obtained or viewed.

Certainly the congregation seems to respond to acting out Scripture. Perhaps this is because, "theater is transformational and transgressive" according to Schnechner.⁷² Something special happened with the students in the Belhar workshop who learned that Scripture through a dramatic rendering. They could see themselves in the story. To put it another way, "the

⁷² Richard Bauman, ed., *Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments A Communications Centered Handbook*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 273.

interiorization of the story makes it possible to speak to the interiors of others⁷³.” The group is still asking about performing for the whole congregation. Mott Haven needs to find more opportunities for that kind of connection to be made with Scripture. Transformation begins in the heart. The teachings of Jesus, brought to life speak to the heart and breaks down barriers. Stories that you learn are stored in the heart and are received by someone else’s heart. The language of the heart like music, transcends cultural boundaries. Boomershine reminds us that, “Another dimension of the story journey is that Jesus Christ joins us in our journeys. If the adventures of the Gospels are learned deeply, our stories get woven together with Jesus’ story.⁷⁴” A solution perhaps to enhancing the Bible literacy of the congregation, is to allow them to tell the story through drama. It need not be a large group of people, but given the congregation’s response it is very likely that more would want to join in once they see some of the members doing it. It would also reshape the worship service for them by giving them a role to play. If the church is able to incorporate biblical storytelling into its planned foster care arts program, it will further enhance worship, not only for the congregation but for the children and quite possibly the parents or foster parents in this case. Boomershine goes on to say that, “there is a quantum leap in the story journey when the stories begin to be told to others. It is only in telling someone else that you experience the resonance and power of the stories through you.⁷⁵” The story of the Gospels, learned and internalized, acted out are the ones that can transform us, turning a stony heart to flesh.

Additionally, to feed the people’s spiritual needs means finding ways to nurture them in the context of the twenty-first century. “Architects of twentieth-century pastoral care have long suggested that a primary pastoral function is helping people join their individual narratives to the

⁷³ Thomas E. Boomershine, *Story Journey An invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988) 52.

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

narrative found in the faith story. In other words, how can I find in my personal story, places that connect with the biblical faith, and how does the biblical faith help me understand my life?⁷⁶” A video or audio blog for Bible study or online daily devotionals will help people to see their lives in the biblical story. Jesus taught using parables, with practical wisdom, many of them agrarian in nature because he lived in an agrarian society. Meeting the people where they were, he painted a picture for them so that they could envision it in their own lives and thus receive his message, which is all that biblical storytelling is anyway.

⁷⁶ Paul Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes, ed., *The Bible in Pastoral Practice Reading in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005) 287.

Ministry to the Hispanic Community

Relational activity will be the key to engaging with the Hispanic community. Mott Haven has several activities that have fostered a lot of good will in the Hispanic community and they should continue. Family and Friends Day and the Community Block Party are two activities that were very successful and had a very high level of participation among Hispanics. Continuing to use bilingual invitations to invite people to the church, while it has not seen a result just yet, will pay off dividends in the future. Just getting out there and talking to people is laying the ground work for future relationships. “The church in a multicultural world is called to bless the nations by valuing persons and cultures in their particularity.”⁷⁷ As Mott Haven continues to seek ways in which to strengthen its bond with the Hispanic community, it will be important to remember that “particularity” adds to the richness of the mosaic of people that make up the Mott Haven community. This suggests that in becoming an intentional church, Mott Haven needs to pay attention to what might appeal to the Hispanic community. Ongoing training in hospitality will be necessary to ensure that behaviors are redirected. Openness toward people who are different and a genuine welcoming attitude on the part of congregants will go a long way. We are reminded by the Belhar Confession that “unity is both a gift and an obligation to the church.” We are to seek unity in every way. Mott Haven has already created church brochures in Spanish and that is good. Incorporating the Spanish language into all the literature about the church, like Sunday bulletins, along with obtaining Bibles in Spanish can help visitors believe that Mott Haven can be a home to them. “The vitality of churches that honor the use of the Spanish language and/or affirm Hispanic cultural distinctives is a testimony to their religious roots.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood Serving the World in Christ Like Humility*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006) 62.

⁷⁸ Robert W. Pazmino, “Liberative Educational Practice” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, ed. Alvin Padilla, Roberta Goizueta, and Eldin Villafane, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005) 240.

In addition, it is important to understand that the Hispanic community will look to the parish (or church) for social services. “Parishes in inner-city neighborhoods, particularly immigrant Catholic communities are more than a local church – they are general service centers for families...People come for every kind of need, food, shelter, clothing, health care and legal aid.⁷⁹” Mott Haven of course cannot be a full service center at this point, but again, with the restart of the pantry, the establishment of the advisory committee and the launching of a CDC can be seen positively by the Hispanic community. The food pantry of course is the quickest path to providing a direct service. It will be of benefit to the whole community and Hispanics in particular as evidenced by the overwhelming response to the pantry in 2012. Likewise a great deal of good can be done for the whole community, not just our Hispanic neighbors by the kinds of programming that a CDC can undertake. The advisory committee should seek not only to include but to identify Hispanic leaders for the group. In the same way that the church was the training ground for many in the African American community, that kind of service is looked upon as an honorable. “Most Hispanic leaders are made and rise up from within their communities and in particular their church communities. It is there they are given the safe space to develop, to take risks and where their gifts are nurtured and affirmed.⁸⁰” Mott Haven should mine this population for dedicated volunteers looking to fulfill this sacred vocation. It can be the spark that the church needs. As they bring their gifts to the table, they also bring their cultural perspective and dedication to service. The church gets committed volunteers and simultaneously boosts its numbers.

Efrain Agosto pays homage to scholar Justo Gonzalez in his treatise on Marginality and Solidarity in 1 Corinthians, as he examines the hermeneutics of exile and aliens found in the

⁷⁹ Charles W. Dahm, *Parish Ministry in a Hispanic Community*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2004) 236.

⁸⁰ Zaida Maldonado Perez, “Leadership in the Latina/o Community,” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, ed. Alvin Padilla, Roberta Goizueta, and Eldin Villafane, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005) 127.

Scriptures. If we look at passages like Psalm 137 and consider that many Hispanics have had to leave behind a beloved homeland, while Jeremiah 29:5 challenges the exiles to build houses and plant gardens. In other words, to make the best of where they are. Moreover the Scripture tells them to pray for the city because the health of the city is in their hands.⁸¹ The ability to see the Word through their eyes and to be able to help them see themselves is critically important. Whether they ever come into the church or not, we know that they are watching and listening. They need to hear the gospel preached in a way that is relevant to their cultural perspective. It will be critical for Mott Haven to continue to invite Hispanic ministers to preach and to move quickly to get people from the Hispanic and other ethnic groups into the leadership. They are watching and listening and they will be watching to see if they are represented at Mott Haven. Collaboration with other churches can help in this area. Some special services with a Hispanic church might generate a fair amount of interest, especially if it is promoted well and early. The Harvest Fields Community Church might be willing to participate in such an endeavor since they are looking to expand.

In the end, reaching out to the Hispanic community will be less about creating so-called “Hispanic” ministries and more about becoming an inclusive and truly multi-cultural congregation where everyone feels welcome. As we have detailed in the examples of churches visited, this is what draws Hispanics, Caucasians, Asians and everybody else. “God calls us to remind the world of the high value and worth God has placed not only on each person but on each family, ethnicity, tribe, tongue and nation. We not only pray for the well-being of persons, but

⁸¹ Efrain Agosto, “Marginality and Solidarity in 1 Corinthians,” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, ed. Alvin Padilla, Roberta Goizueta, and Eldin Villafane, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005) 13.

we also seek to be in relationship with them. Therefore the ministry of blessings cannot be an ethnocentric affair; it must be a family affair as in all the families of the earth.⁸²”

But we must do the work that will allow us to be culturally sensitive. Mott Haven cannot go from a monoculture to a multicultural congregation. And before they can get to be multicultural, there is still work to be done in learning how to truly embrace the Hispanic population of Mott Haven. It is like a garden, even before you can plant seeds, you have to go to till the soil and dig up all the rocks and debris. The church should also understand that in trying to relate to the Hispanic community that within that community there are categories of being “Hispanic”, i.e. Dominican, Mexican, South American, Black Hispanics, White Hispanics, etc.

Ongoing teaching on hospitality should be an intentional part of the church’s planning every year. Applying the work of Dr. James A. Banks on the five dimensions of multiculturalism to the hospitality curriculum might be a useful addition in their arsenal.

In an interview with Michelle Tucker for NEA Today, Dr. Banks theorizes that in order to achieve multicultural education one needs to understand the process of content integration – putting the Hispanics into the curriculum and making sure that several perspectives are covered; knowledge construction – helping the people understand, investigate and determine the implicit cultural assumptions and frames of reference; , equity pedagogy- using modifying teaching methods so that to enable everyone to understand; , prejudice reduction - developing positive racial attitudes; and empowering culture – learning to make the culture more equitable⁸³.

Dr. Banks also suggests, “that vicarious experiences such as video tapes, simulation games and films can be very powerful and can positively affect student’s racial attitudes.”⁸⁴”

Using this strategy to undergird teaching on hospitality and how we engage others could prove to

⁸² Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood Serving the Word in Christ Like Humility*, (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2006) 62.

⁸³ James A. Banks, Michelle Tucker, Multiculturalsim’s Five Dimensions, [www.NEA](http://www.NEA.org) Today Online.org, access 1/14/14.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

be invaluable in helping Mott Haven to become truly multicultural. He ends by saying that his concepts can be summed up this way, “to know, to care and to act. That is to say, in order to bring about reform and to bring about self-transformation, we need knowledge. We cannot do it in ignorance. But knowledge is not enough. We also have to care...Finally we need to act because Dante said that the worst place in Hell is reserved for those who in times of great moral crisis, take a neutral position⁸⁵.” The situation in Mott Haven is as great a moral crisis as any other and the church needs to do all that it can to address it and to champion for real solutions. We can no longer be neutral about what is happening in our community.

Two other important concepts that we ought to take the time to understand the ways in which the Hispanic community forms alliances. According to Pazmino this is called *mixing and huddling*. “In huddling, Hispanic persons themselves gather as a community by choice or survival to foster a sense of identity and solidarity. In huddling common bonds and causes are identified and persons organize to address corporate needs and demands. In mixing Hispanic persons form bridges and alliance with non-Hispanics to address broader communal and societal issues. Life in a multi-cultural setting calls for both processes of huddling and mixing⁸⁶.” Future programming at Mott Haven will need to take these cultural nuances into consideration and allow room for both processes to occur.

Although it did not rank high on our community survey, the cause of immigration might be a good place to form alliances since so much of the community are Hispanic (80%) and immigrants (33.5%). In discussing people’s fear of immigrants, Aurora Camacho de Schmidt says that we, “must realize that the injustice embodied in each human being who is forced to leave his or her home and survive in a hostile place parallels that suffered by each homeless,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Robert W. Pazmino, “Liberative Educational Practice” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, ed., Alvin Padilla, Roberta Goizueta, and Eldin Villafane, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005) 240.

jobless, hungry, uneducated, sick and neglected U.S. citizen.⁸⁷” As African Americans, we can surely relate. We know what it is to be thought of as less than human and treated as second class citizens. Four hundred years of slavery and decades of segregation and Jim Crow, racial hatred, we know this story all too well. How do we reach out to the Hispanic community in ways that are transformative? By first trying to understand them and their concerns and realizing that their concerns are our concerns. We have more in common than any cultural differences we have. We have a common enemy – economic exploitation and economic disparity. Homelessness, crime, drugs and unemployment are things that everyone in Mott Haven is or should be concerned about. We are all Mott Haven. That means, “we share a similar situation but we inhabit it differently...If I am to love my neighbor as myself and thus fulfill what Jesus calls the second greatest commandment (Matt. 2:39), then I will have to work hard to understand him. For I cannot love my neighbor unless I understand him and the world he inhabits.⁸⁸”

Mott Haven recently celebrated its 162nd church anniversary. The theme was “God is Doing a New Thing.” The preacher for its anniversary revival told the congregation they should prepare to enter a new season. Mott Haven need only heed the signs, stay connected to both the congregation and the community by being intentional and participatory. It will require them to do the work to prepare itself for the future by being culturally sensitive. Mott Haven can be a “new old church.” However, old paradigms must give way to new ways of being the church in the 21st century. Indeed God is doing something new and if the church is brave enough to make the shift, then it will become Emmaus once again – the place where they met the resurrected Jesus on their journey.

⁸⁷ Aurora Camacho de Schmidt. “Mi Casa No Es Su Casa” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, ed., Alvin Padilla, Roberta Goizueta, and Eldin Villafane, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005) 318.

⁸⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, Michael J. Sleasman, ed., *Everyday Theology How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 19.

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